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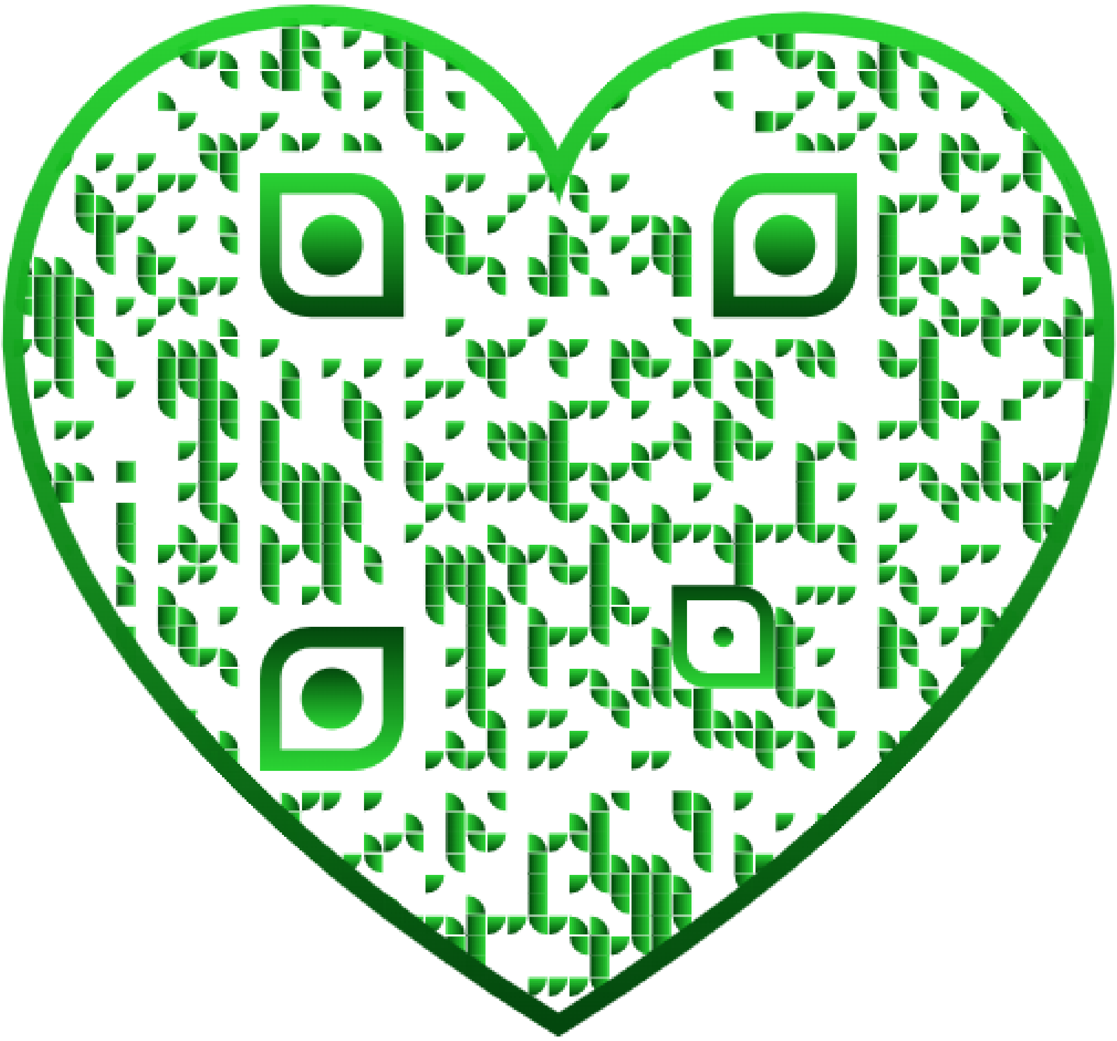

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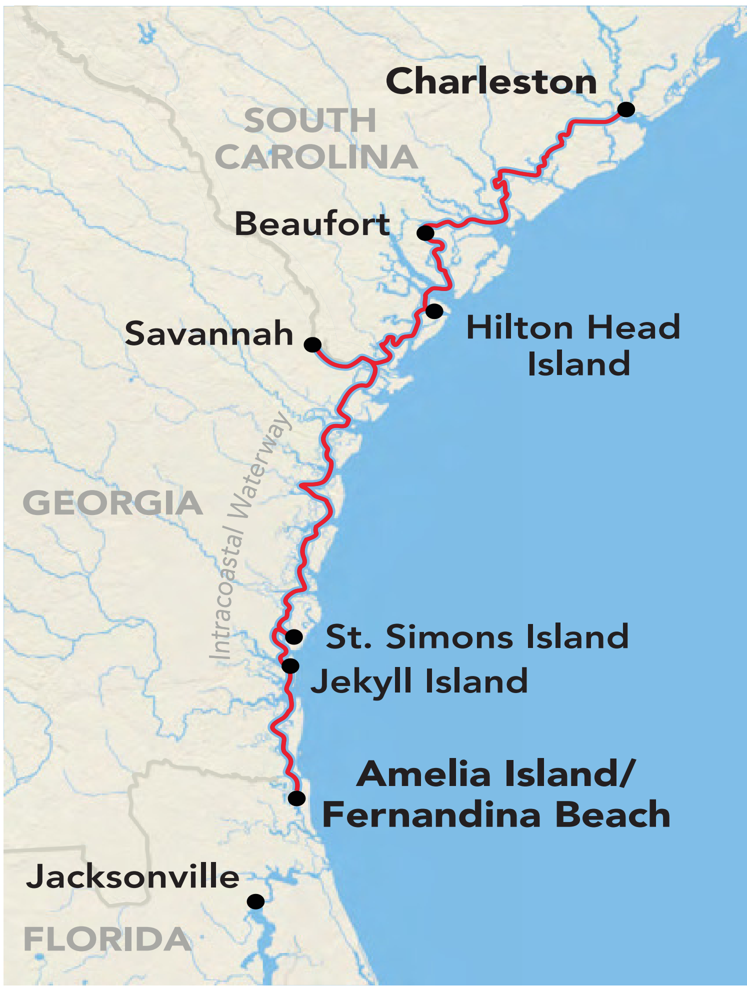
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Contents

BIRDS & BLOOMS JUNE | JULY 2025

Female rufous hummingbird

23
Hummingbird Tales

8

42

FEATURES

32
Ultimate Guide to Hummingbirds
Create a haven for these fliers with feeder tips and blooms they love.

38
The Perfect Pairing
Attract more birds when you add plants to your feeding station.

42
Doing Important Work
Readers share amazing snapshots of pollinators at work.

GARDEN WITH A PURPOSE

8 **Garden With a Purpose**

10 **Feeder Talk**
Rufous hummingbirds

12 **Top 10**
Heat-tolerant plants

18 **Yard Smarts**
Learn about millicomposting

21 **Essentials**
Periwinkle vs. impatiens

23 **Bird Tales**

BACKYARD CHAT

49 **Annual Photo Contest**

51 **Ask the Experts**

57 **Across the Fence**
Annuals or perennials?

58 **Field Guide**
Hummingbird banding

60 **Caption This!**

62 **Did You Know?**
Fertilizer facts

IN EVERY ISSUE

6 **From the Editor**

61 **For the Reader**

32

ON THE COVER

Ruby-throated hummingbird
Photo by Mike Matthews

Sugar-Water Recipe p. 32
Heat-Loving Blooms p. 12
Win $1,000 p. 49
Migration Secrets p. 58
Attract Hummingbirds p. 32

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FROM THE EDITOR

Summer Sights

Welcome to the annual hummingbird issue! Enjoy more than 35 photos of these amazing birds of summer. In addition to the inspiring photography, learn all about the rufous and how it has a tendency to be a vagrant in "Going the Distance" on page 10. And attract more flying jewels than ever with the advice and top picks for blooms in "Ultimate Guide to Hummingbirds" on page 32. Plus, find out how banding helps researchers learn more about hummingbird migration in "Tracking Tiny Travelers" on page 58. It's truly the best time of the year—backyards are alive with the sights and sounds of the season! Keep a camera close! Find out how to enter our photo contest on page 49.

Kirsten

KIRSTEN SCHRADER, CONTENT DIRECTOR

FAMILY TIES

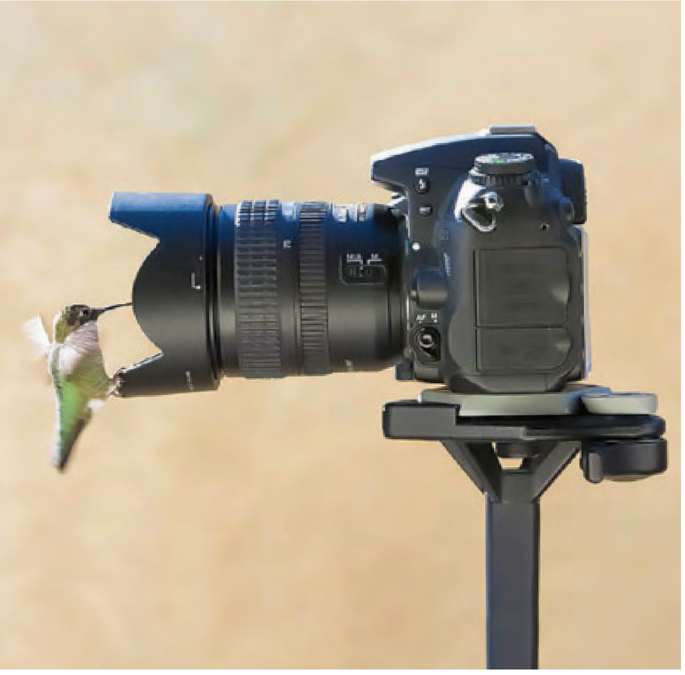
My son was in a 2005 issue of *Birds & Blooms* with an orange feeder that he made. When my granddaughter, Milaina, saw it, she made one for her mom for Mother's Day. Another generation is enjoying *Birds & Blooms* 20 years later!

Georganne Kaehler
WINONA, MN

READY FOR A CLOSE UP

While I was out photographing hummingbirds, curiosity got the best of this one, and it came to check out my camera. It really happened—it's not photoshopped!

Paul Jemo LAKESIDE, CA



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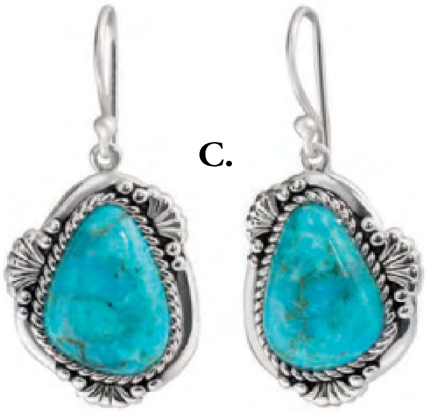
SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION

Centuries ago, Persians, Tibetans and Mayans considered turquoise a gemstone of the heavens, believing the striking blue stones were sacred pieces of sky. Today, the rarest and most valuable turquoise is found in the American Southwest— but the future of the blue beauty is unclear.

On a recent trip to Tucson, we spoke with fourth generation turquoise traders who explained that less than five percent of turquoise mined worldwide can be set into jewelry and only about twenty mines in the Southwest supply gem-quality turquoise. Once a thriving industry, many Southwest mines have run dry and are now closed.



We found a limited supply of turquoise from Arizona and purchased it for our ***Sedona Turquoise Collection***. Inspired by the work of those ancient craftsmen and designed to showcase the exceptional blue stone, each stabilized vibrant cabochon features a unique, one-of-a-kind matrix surrounded in Bali metalwork. You could drop over $1,200 on a turquoise pendant, or you could secure 26 carats of genuine Arizona turquoise for **just $99**.

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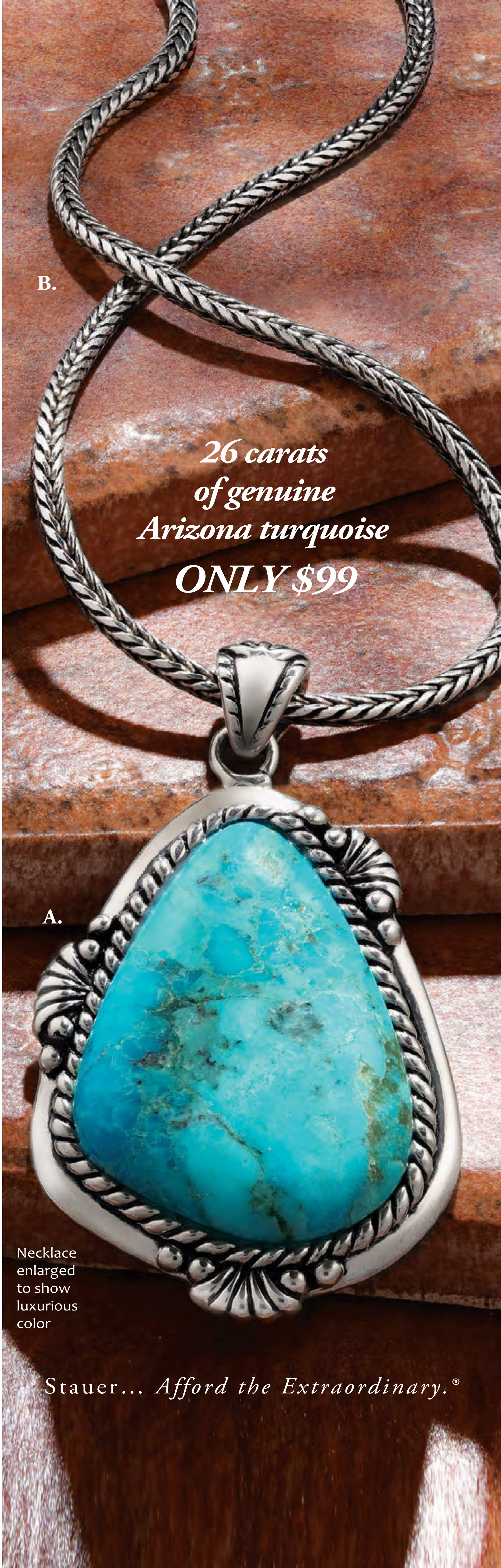
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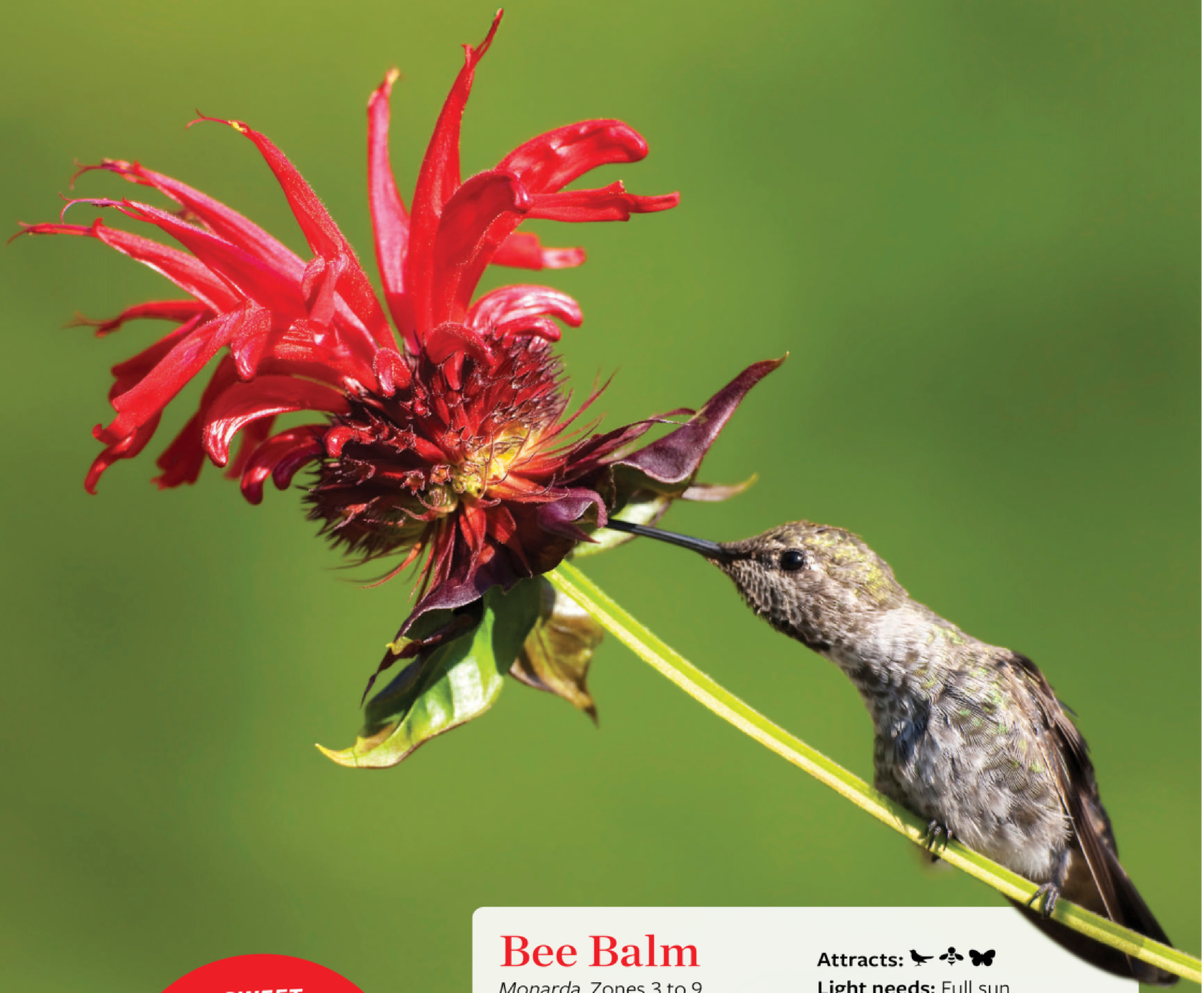
GARDEN WITH A PURPOSE

Pollinator Magnet

Create a hummingbird hot spot with this interesting flower



SWEET SOLUTION

Bumblebees can't fit inside bee balm's long flowers. Instead, they create a hole at the base to get to the nectar inside.

Bee Balm

Monarda, Zones 3 to 9

This native perennial is beloved by hummingbirds and gardeners alike, and for good reason. It comes in a range of vivid reds, purples and pinks, and its leaves have an aromatic, minty scent. Space bee balm plants at least 18 inches apart to improve air circulation and reduce risk of fungal disease.

Attracts: 🐦 🐝 🦋

Light needs: Full sun.

Size: 2 to 4 feet tall.

Grown for: Bright-colored, tube-shaped flowers that hummingbirds can't resist.

Cultivars to try: For a compact yet vibrant version, plant Fireball bee balm. Try resistant cultivars such as Colrain Red and Marshall's Delight if powdery mildew is a concern.

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Male rufous hummingbird

Going the Distance

The tiny rufous hummingbird has a tendency to travel far and wide **BY KAITLIN STAINBROOK**

Blink and you might miss them, but you'll probably hear them—as rufous hummingbirds zip through the air at astounding speeds, their wings move so fast that they create a buzzing sound.

Ready to Roam

You'll generally find rufous hummingbirds out west, but they have an astonishingly wide range, spending summer months as far north as Alaska and migrating as much as 4,000 miles down to Mexico for the winter.

But Kim Savides, a research support specialist for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Project FeederWatch, notes that Project FeederWatch volunteers have observed rufous hummingbirds across 40 states and provinces. "Of all of the North American hummingbirds, rufous have more vagrant tendencies, and this is very evident in the FeederWatch data," Kim says.

Tail Feather Tell

Rufous hummingbirds look very similar to Allen's hummingbirds, which have a more limited range near the southern Pacific Coast. The center of the upper back of the adult male Allen's is green while it is copper brown on a rufous. In addition, Kim says to look for tail shape. "Allen's hummingbirds have narrower tail feathers, while adult male rufous have broader tail feathers, and their second feather from the middle shows a pinched-in notch on the inside tip of the feather." Females and juveniles of the two species differ in the same ways, but the distinctions are usually too subtle to be easily seen.

Aerial Antics

Both male and female rufous hummingbirds are willing to pick a fight. It's common to see these birds flying at one another, bills aimed like swords, defending their claim to a backyard feeder. They also fan their tails out in a show of aggression.

Parenting Styles

During the mating season, the female builds a cup-shaped nest out of lichen, moss and spiderwebs and lays up to three eggs. The nest is tiny (about 2 inches across) and the eggs even tinier—only half an inch in length. Unlike some other birds, male hummingbirds don't participate in nest building or caring for their young.

Sweet Tooth

To attract these birds to your backyard, offer up sugar water. Kim says to skip the artificial red dye though. "It's not necessary for hummingbirds to find the nectar, and it can be harmful," Kim says. "Sugar water should be swapped out every few days or daily in hot weather to prevent spoilage."

THE FEED

Juvenile rufous hummingbird

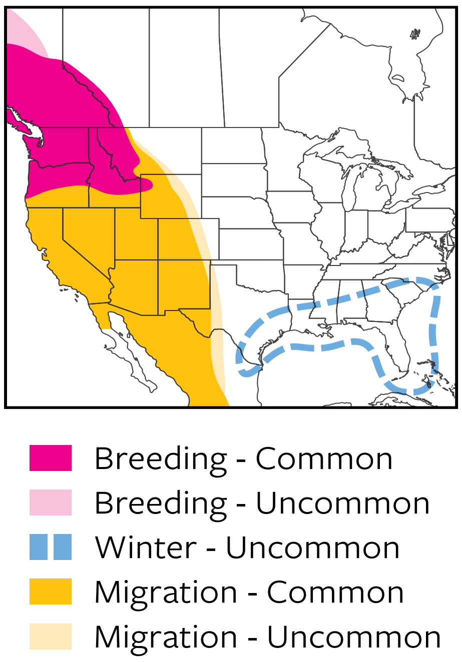
GOING FULL SPEED

Rufous hummingbirds can beat their wings up to 62 beats per second—that's about 3,700 beats per minute. The keys to their speed are their incredibly strong muscles and wing anatomy, which allow them to move their wings in a hyperefficient figure-eight pattern.

INSECT INVITATION

Rufous hummingbirds rely on spiders and small insects as their main protein source, and they snap them up in midair or from spiderwebs. Build a backyard bug community by eliminating pesticides and planting native perennials.

RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD RANGE MAP



FROM LEFT: BOB KOTHENBEUTEL; MICHAEL H SPIVAK/GETTY IMAGES

TOP 10

The Hotter, the Better

Try these heat-tolerant picks that hummingbirds love **BY PEGGY RICCIO**

Luscious
Berry
Blend

2

1 Coral honeysuckle

LONICERA SEMPERVIRENS,
ZONES 4 TO 9

A native known for supporting pollinators, coral honeysuckle has tubular flowers that bloom in the spring and summer in a range of fiery colors. Although the plant can handle a little bit of shade, it will bloom more profusely when grown in full sun and rich, well-draining soil.

Why we love it:

A lightweight woody vine, honeysuckle can be trained to climb trellises or obelisks for height.

2 Lantana

LANTANA SPP.,
ZONES 8 TO 11

A summer blooming tropical, lantana is a northern annual and a southern perennial with clusters of bright flowers that pollinators love. They are excellent in containers, in full sun and well-draining soil. Lantana is invasive in some areas, so be sure to research before planting.

Why we love it:

This summer staple offers many options to choose from: compact sizes, trailing shapes and unusual color combos.

3

3 Red hot poker

KNIPHOFIA SPP., ZONES 5 TO 9

These summer blooming focal points grow up to 4 feet tall and require full sun and well-draining soil. Flower heads of compact tubular florets attract butterflies, birds, bees and hummingbirds. Some flower heads are monochromatic in sunset colors, while others can have orange/red florets on top and yellow on the bottom.

Why we love it: Red hot pokers bloom above most plants, so they don't compete for space.

CONTAINER CLUSTERS *Because they are heat and drought tolerant, many of these plants work well in containers that tend to dry out faster than plants in the ground. Consider grouping several containers together to increase your hummingbird visits.*

Totally Tempted
Richly Red

4

4 Cuphea

CUPHEA SPP., ANNUAL

Tropicals grown as annuals, cupheas bloom in the orange-red-purple color palette. Cupheas attract hummingbirds, butterflies and bees and are tolerant of hot and humid summers. They thrive in full sun and well-draining soil.

Why we love it: Cuphea colors are perfect for the transition from summer to fall, and for Halloween!

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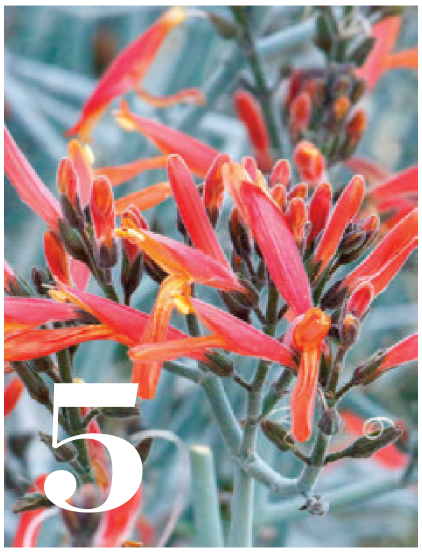
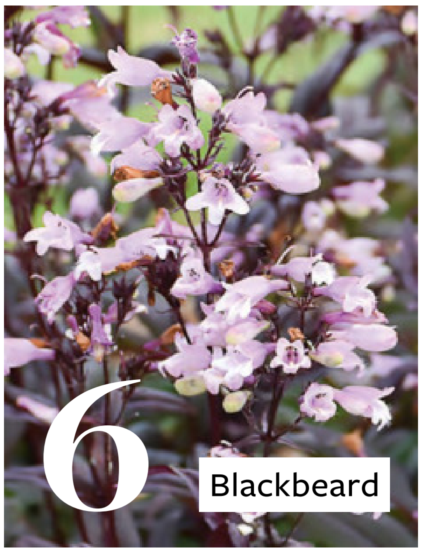




5 Chuparosa

JUSTICIA CALIFORNICA,
ZONES 9 TO 11

Native to the southwest, chuparosa is a tough desert perennial shrub covered in orange-red tubular flowers. Chuparosa thrives in full sun and well-draining soil, including rocky or sandy soil. The foliage may drop to save moisture, which allows stems to photosynthesize.

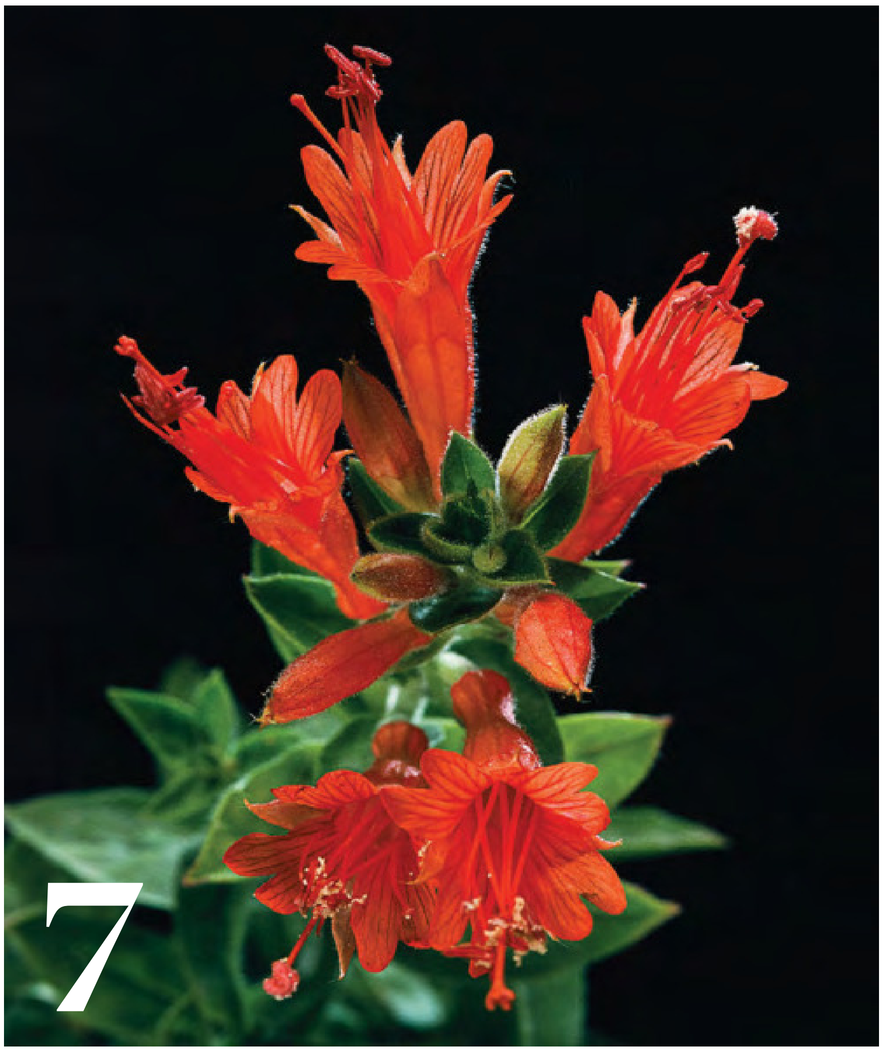
Why we love it: Hummingbirds look for chuparosa during their spring migration.

6 Penstemon

PENSTEMON SPP.,
ZONES 3 TO 9

Some penstemon are natives that thrive in arid conditions and some are brightly colored hybrids that tolerate humid summers. All are full-sun perennials that tolerate drought and need well-draining soil. Flowers are spikes of tubular blossoms above green or dark burgundy foliage.

Why we love it: The wide range of colors available offers something for everyone.



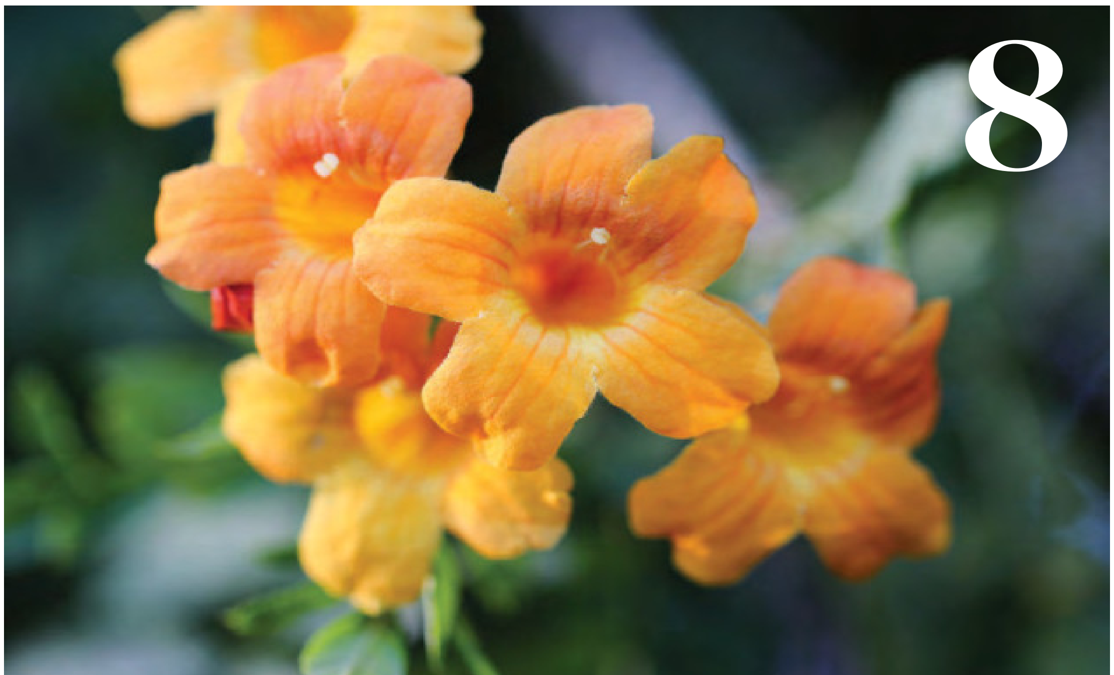
7 Hummingbird trumpet

EPILOBIUM CANUM (FORMERLY *ZAUSCHNERIA*), ZONES 8 TO 10

A fire-resistant native of the west, hummingbird trumpet is a 2-to-3-feet-tall woody perennial subshrub with gray-green foliage. Flowers bloom from summer through autumn, providing nectar for hummingbirds' southern migration. This low-maintenance xeric plant is very adaptable as long as it is in full sun and well-draining soil.

Why we love it: Well suited for rock gardens, this shrub also cascades nicely over a brick wall or slope.

KEEP ON BLOOMING *Deadheading, which is removing spent flower heads, encourages plants to bloom continuously. This is important to hummingbirds and pollinators. Frequently snip—cut, don't pull—off old flower heads, and put them in your compost.*



8 Cross vine

BIGNONIA CAPREOLATA, ZONES 5 TO 9

Native cross vine has large trumpet-shaped flowers that bloom in late spring or early summer. It tolerates some shade but prefers full sun and well-draining soil high in organic matter. In the south, it is a drought-resistant evergreen.

Why we love it: Fast-growing cross vine adds vertical interest, softens lines of a building and creates a privacy screen.

5: JARED QUENTIN/GETTY IMAGES; 6: WALTERS GARDENS, INC; 7: PAUL STAROSTA, 8: RONIMESHULAMABRAMOVITZ/GETTY IMAGES (2)

Meant to Bee
Queen Nectarine

9 Agastache

AGASTACHE SPP.,
ZONES 4 TO 10

A member of the mint family, agastache is a drought-tolerant perennial that blooms from summer to fall in full sun and well-draining soil. The tubular, two-lipped blossoms grow on stalks above the foliage.

Why we love it: Cultivars come in eye-popping color combos that are easy to love.

MAKE A PLAN AHEAD OF TIME

- Locate sunny places in the garden where heat-lovers will thrive.
- Plant as soon as you can or as soon as your nursery has them in stock.
- Water well at first to get them established.
- Deadhead frequently to promote a longer and more continuous bloom season.

Male ruby-throated
hummingbird

10 Salvia

SALVIA SPP., ZONES 3 TO 11

A well-known hummingbird magnet, the salvia family includes many native types and beautiful cultivars. Ranging from annuals to perennials to woody shrubs, salvia blooms from summer through fall. Most are heat tolerant, preferring full sun and well-draining soil.

Why we love it: From containers to beds, there is a salvia for every gardener.

Peggy places many of these plants in tall containers on the deck to watch hummingbirds through the window from her dining room while drinking her morning coffee.

9: WWW.PROVENWINNERS.COM; 10: HAFSA MURTAZA

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The Dirt on Millicompost

Learn how to use millipedes to increase soil health **BY GEORGIANA ANTOCHI-CRIHAN**

Buggy soil usually brings to mind images of struggling plants overrun by aphids and fungus gnats. But not all bugs are something to agonize over. In fact, many of them are here to help. Predators such as spiders and centipedes keep pest populations in check, and insects that burrow, such as ants, aerate the soil. Most importantly, many insects recycle nutrients from dead organic matter back into the soil.

Like earthworms, millipedes are considered "cold" composters. Instead of the bacteria in the soil breaking up chunks of broccoli, it's the bacteria in their gut. Millipede waste, known as castings, are even more nutrient-rich than earthworm composts. Studies show that plants grown with millipede castings tend to be more vigorous and produce heavier, more abundant fruit than those grown in earthworm compost. In addition to having elevated levels of nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium (NPK), millipede castings are rich in micronutrients such as calcium and magnesium. Their near-neutral pH and excellent moisture retention capacity makes them a great addition to potting mixes.

While worms consume their own body weight in organic matter each day, millipedes can eat up to five times as much as themselves. Making your own millipede compost largely follows the same steps as composting with worms.

1 Choose a Container

Almost anything will do, even a 5-gallon bucket! Just be sure to add ventilation holes and a way to collect leachate, the liquid byproduct of composting. But don't throw it out—diluted leachate makes excellent liquid fertilizer.

NATALIE_/GETTY IMAGES

2 Sprinkle In Organic Waste

Millipedes naturally inhabit the forest floor, so mimicking their diet will yield the best results. Try giving them leaf litter, grass clippings and yard waste. Crushing it up beforehand increases its surface area, which helps millipedes break it down more efficiently.

3 Add Some Water

Aim for 60% to 70% relative humidity. You want the environment to be moist, not soggy. Millipedes are sensitive to water loss, so keeping a consistently humid environment is essential for their survival.

4 Introduce Millipedes

You can catch them in leaf-rich areas such as compost piles or the forest floor. Local millipedes are familiar with your climate and are more likely to thrive in your bin. A good starting ratio is 50 millipedes to 6 pounds of organic matter.

5 Check In Often

Keep an eye on your millipedes to assess their health and activity—new millipedes means that your colony is thriving. It may take a couple of tries to find the combination of species and substrates that work best for you, so adjust as needed.

6 Be Patient and Wait

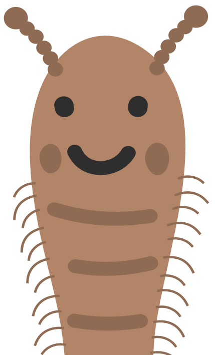
Good things take time, and in the right conditions you can get millicompost in as little as 60 days, but waiting at least 125 days will greatly increase its nutritional value. Using a sifter is an easy way to separate millipedes from their castings so that you can keep your compost going.

MILLIPEDES AND WORMS WORK TOGETHER

Millipedes and earthworms naturally coexist in the wild, so you can put them in a worm bin too. In fact, worms love feeding on the nutrient-rich castings of millipedes as they are a good supplement for their diet. However, keep in mind that millipedes primarily consume leaf litter and may have trouble breaking down other types of organic material that are in worm bins.

MORE TIPS TO TRY

- Consider adding a small amount of manure to your compost. It can supplement their diet and accelerate the composting process.
- To further enhance the nutritional content of compost, pretreat your substrate by mixing it with water and letting it sit for about a month. This gives time for naturally occurring microbes to kick-start the decomposition process, making it easier for millipedes to work through the material.
- When collecting millipedes from the wild, add some of the surrounding soil and leaf litter to your enclosure to introduce beneficial microbes.
- If you're considering buying millipedes online, be sure to do some research. Verify that you're getting a native species found in your area. Exotic or non-native millipedes are potentially harmful to local wildlife. They can displace native insects, transmit diseases and degrade habitats.



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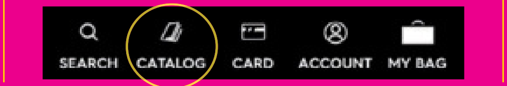

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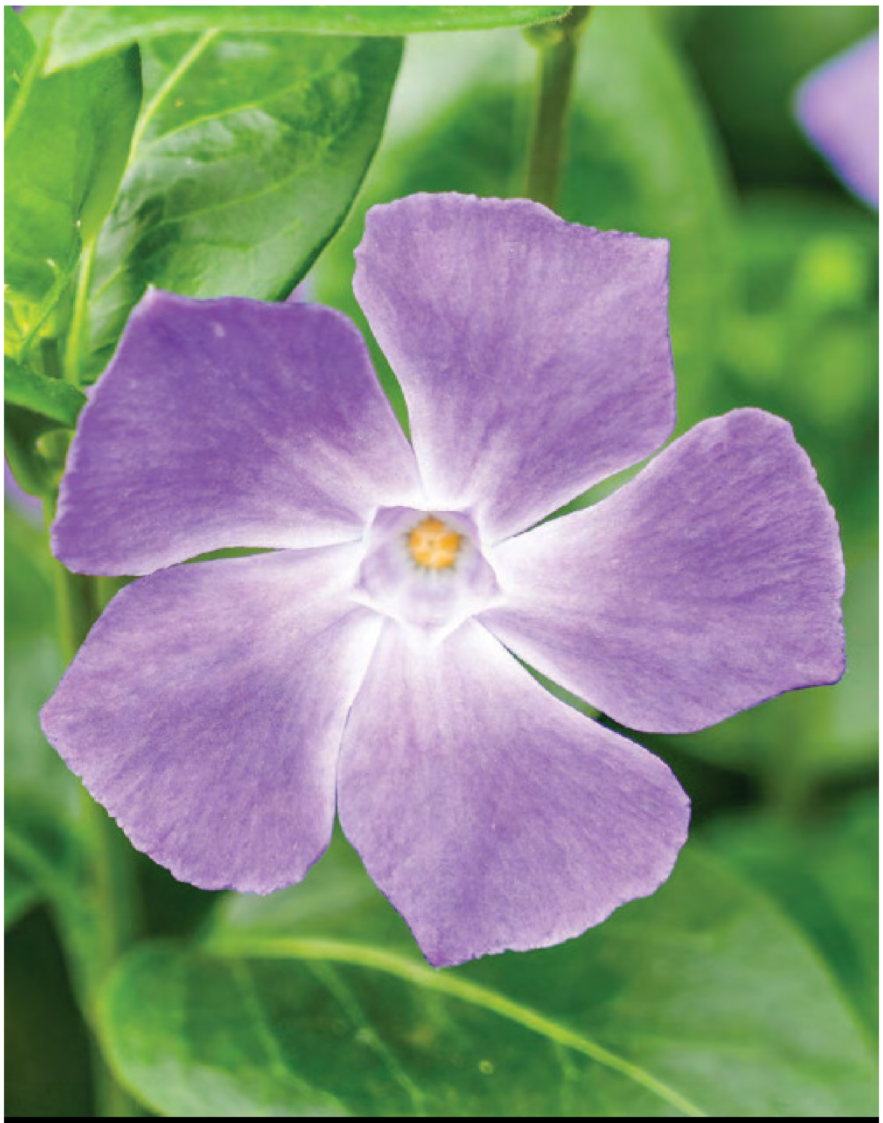
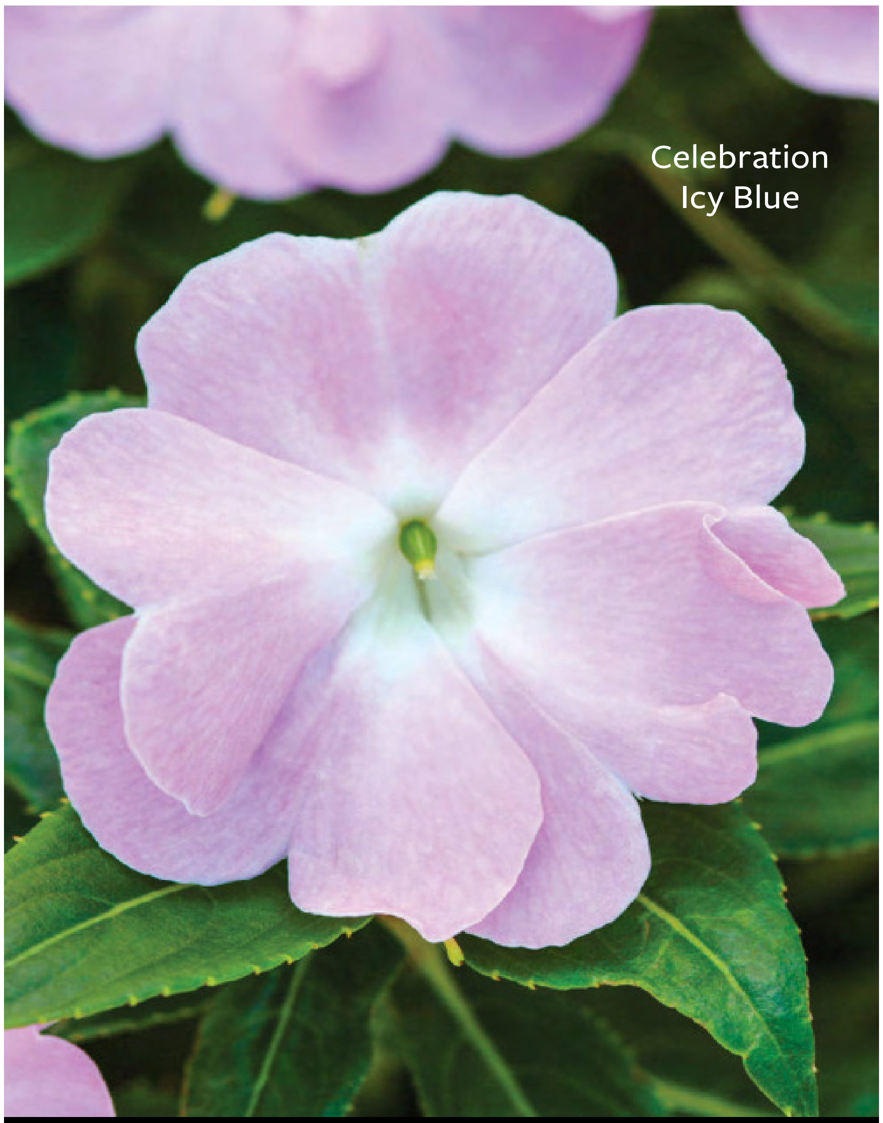


Periwinkle



Celebration Icy Blue

Impatiens

BOTANIC NAME
Vinca minor.

ZONES 4 to 9.

SIZE Primarily a ground cover; grows 3 to 6 inches high and 6 to 18 inches wide.

FLOWER COLOR
A mix of blue, lavender or white from spring well into summer.

GROWING CONDITIONS
Full sun to part shade with well-draining soil.

LEAVES
Dark, glossy, evergreen, leathery and oval-shaped.

BOTANIC NAME
Impatiens.

ZONES Annual.

SIZE Ranges in size, most reach 6 inches to 3 feet tall, and 1 to 2 feet wide.

FLOWER COLOR
Purple, pink, red, yellow or white from summer to fall.

GROWING CONDITIONS
Part shade to shade in moist soil.

LEAVES
Thick, serrated and easily scorched with too much sun.

CREEPING BEAUTIES

Both periwinkle and impatiens can be invasive. Don't plant periwinkle where invasive or potentially a problem, or Himalayan balsam, a member of the impatiens family, anywhere in North America. If you're not sure about a plant, check invasiveplantatlas.org.

FROM LEFT: ELLYMILLER/GETTY IMAGES; BALL HORTICULTURAL COMPANY

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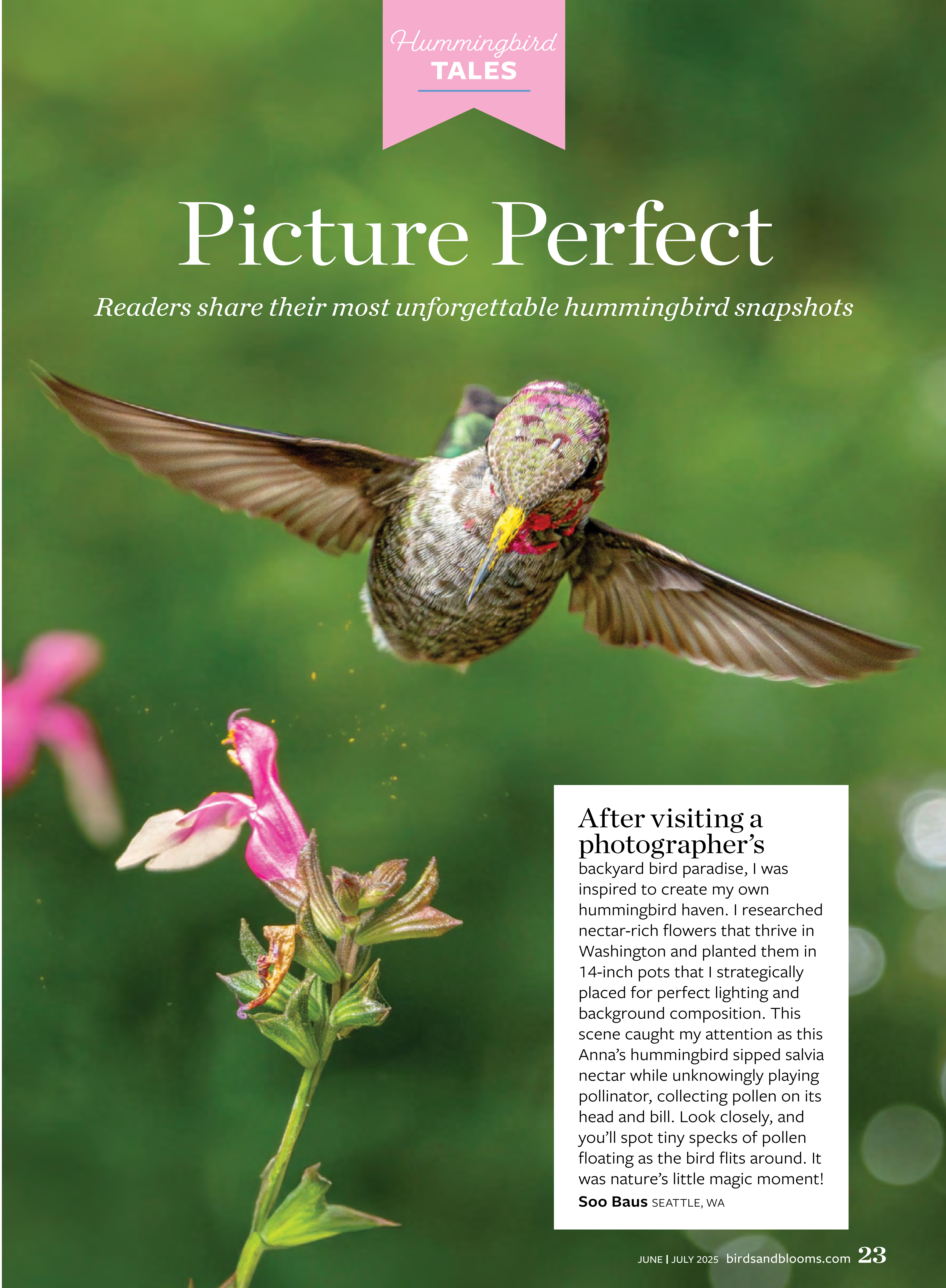
SCAN TO
LEARN MORE

Hummingbird
TALES

Picture Perfect

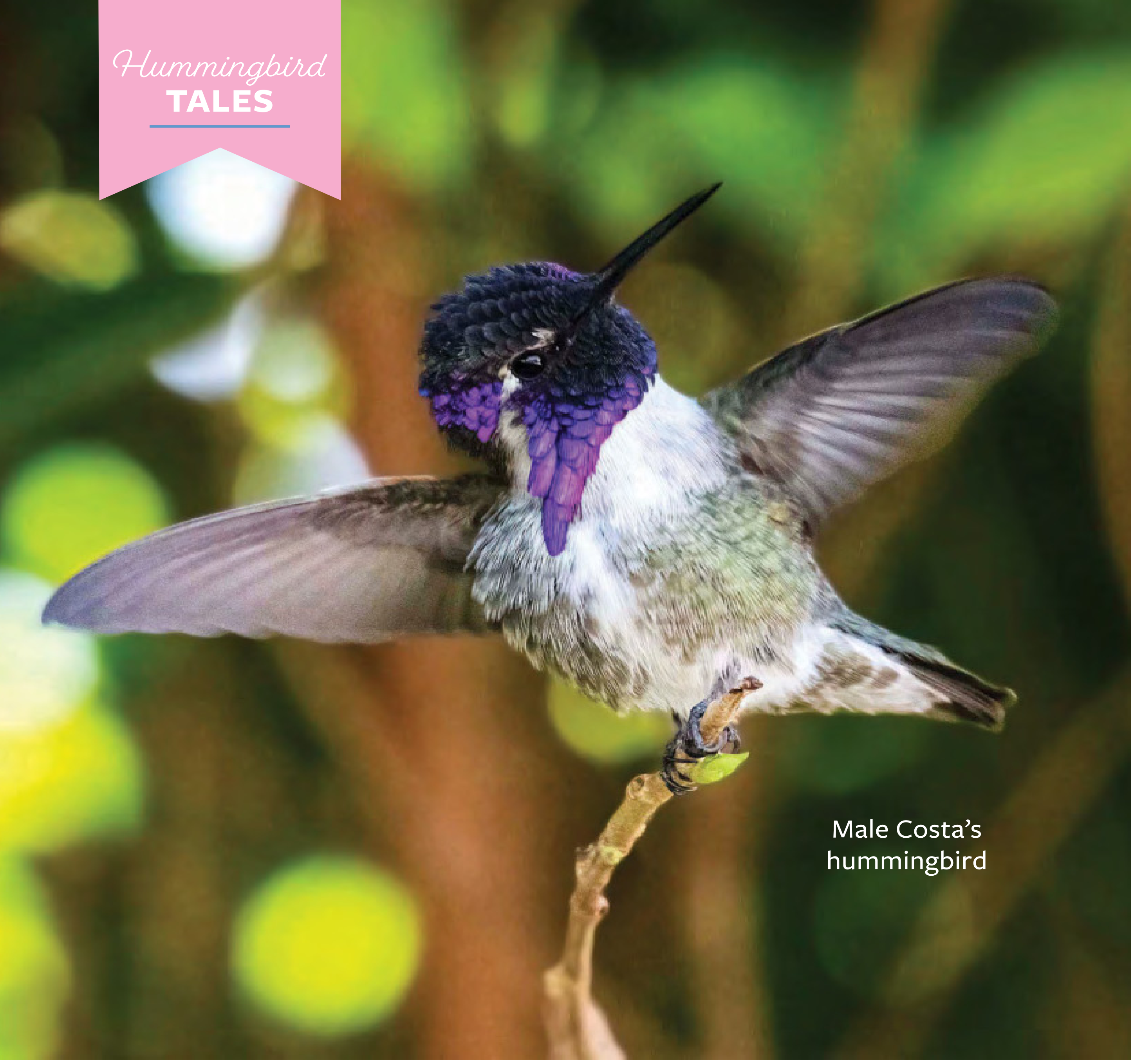
Readers share their most unforgettable hummingbird snapshots



After visiting a photographer's

backyard bird paradise, I was inspired to create my own hummingbird haven. I researched nectar-rich flowers that thrive in Washington and planted them in 14-inch pots that I strategically placed for perfect lighting and background composition. This scene caught my attention as this Anna's hummingbird sipped salvia nectar while unknowingly playing pollinator, collecting pollen on its head and bill. Look closely, and you'll spot tiny specks of pollen floating as the bird flits around. It was nature's little magic moment!

Soo Baus SEATTLE, WA



Male Costa's hummingbird

The bird sanctuary in

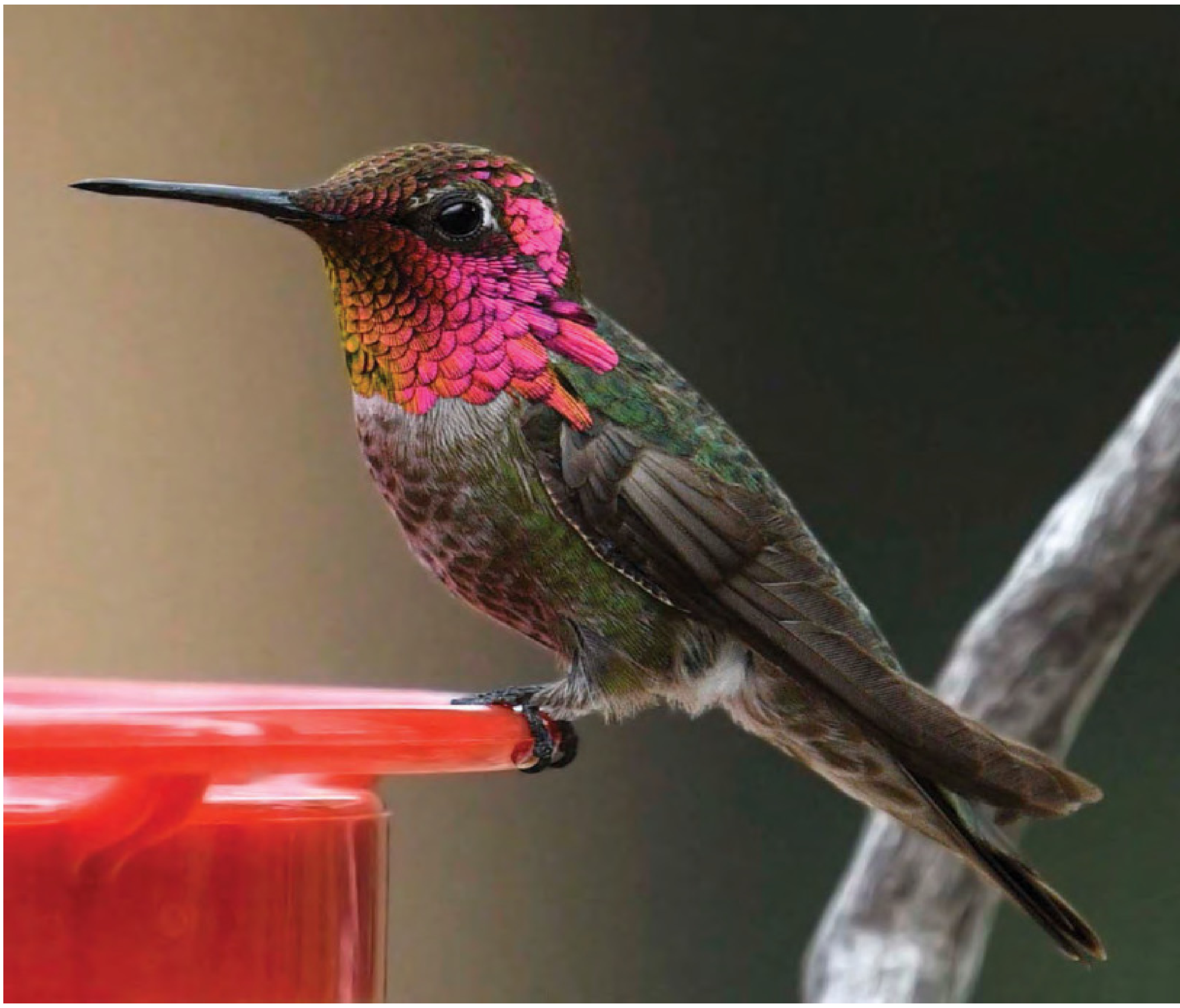
my backyard is managed by four or five hummingbirds who take their job very seriously. I have developed a special bond with these tiny winged wonders. Not only do they pose for portraits almost daily, they also play the role of facilitators. If a new bird appears in the backyard and is unusually shy, I ask one of the hummingbirds to speak to the new guest to see if it would be willing to sit for a portrait. As of yet, not a single one of my hummingbird friends has failed with these requests.

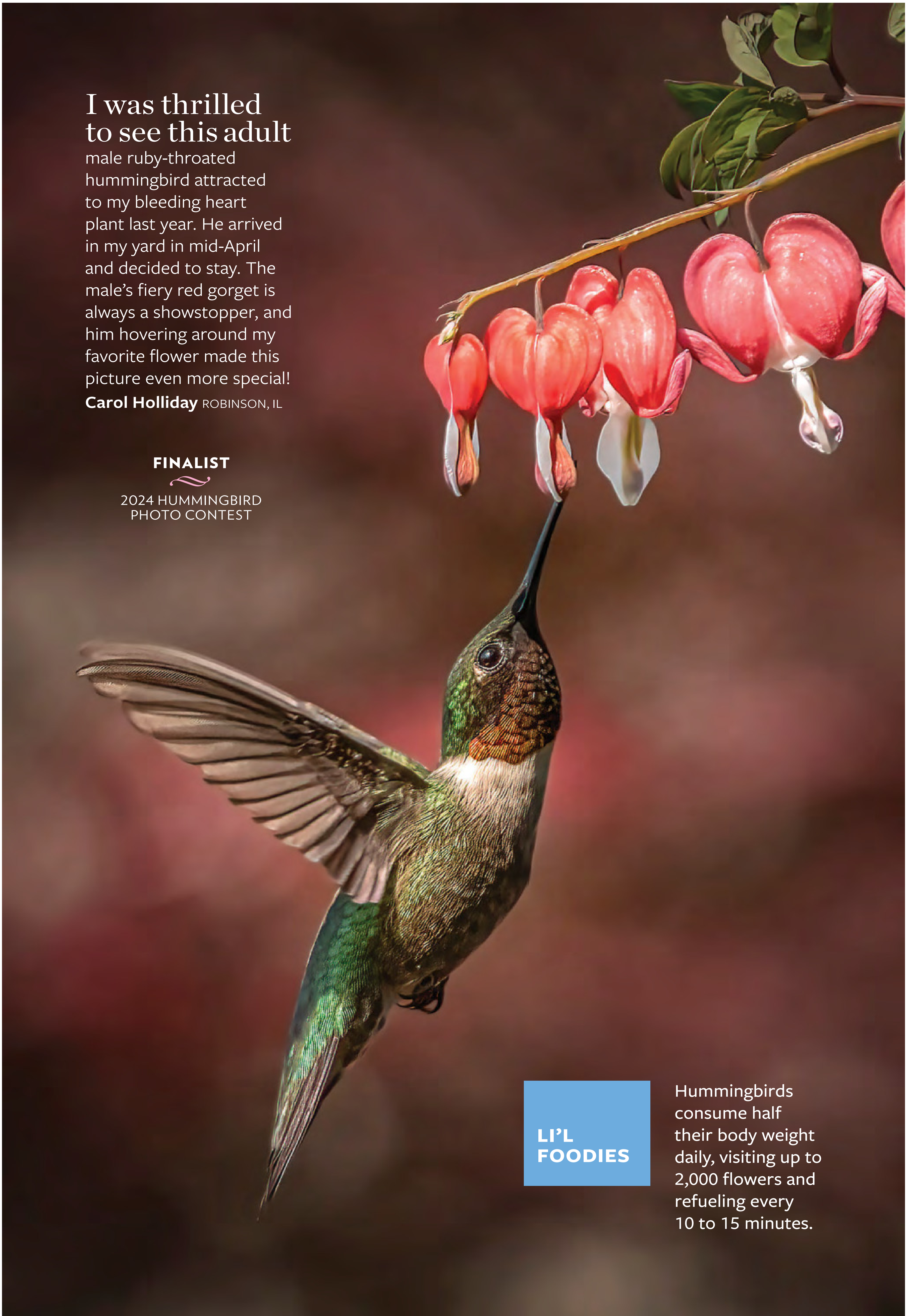
Gary Gruber
BERMUDA DUNES, CA

Last April, I took this photo

in Sierra Vista, Arizona. It's a male Anna's hummingbird, which happened to sit still on the sugar-water feeder with just the right light, showing off a full kaleidoscope of colors—from green to yellow to orange and that signature bright pink. Usually, I only catch the Anna's pink glow. But this time, the angle and lighting worked their magic, giving me a rare rainbow moment.

Matthew Cooke EWING, NJ





I was thrilled to see this adult male ruby-throated hummingbird attracted to my bleeding heart plant last year. He arrived in my yard in mid-April and decided to stay. The male's fiery red gorget is always a showstopper, and him hovering around my favorite flower made this picture even more special!

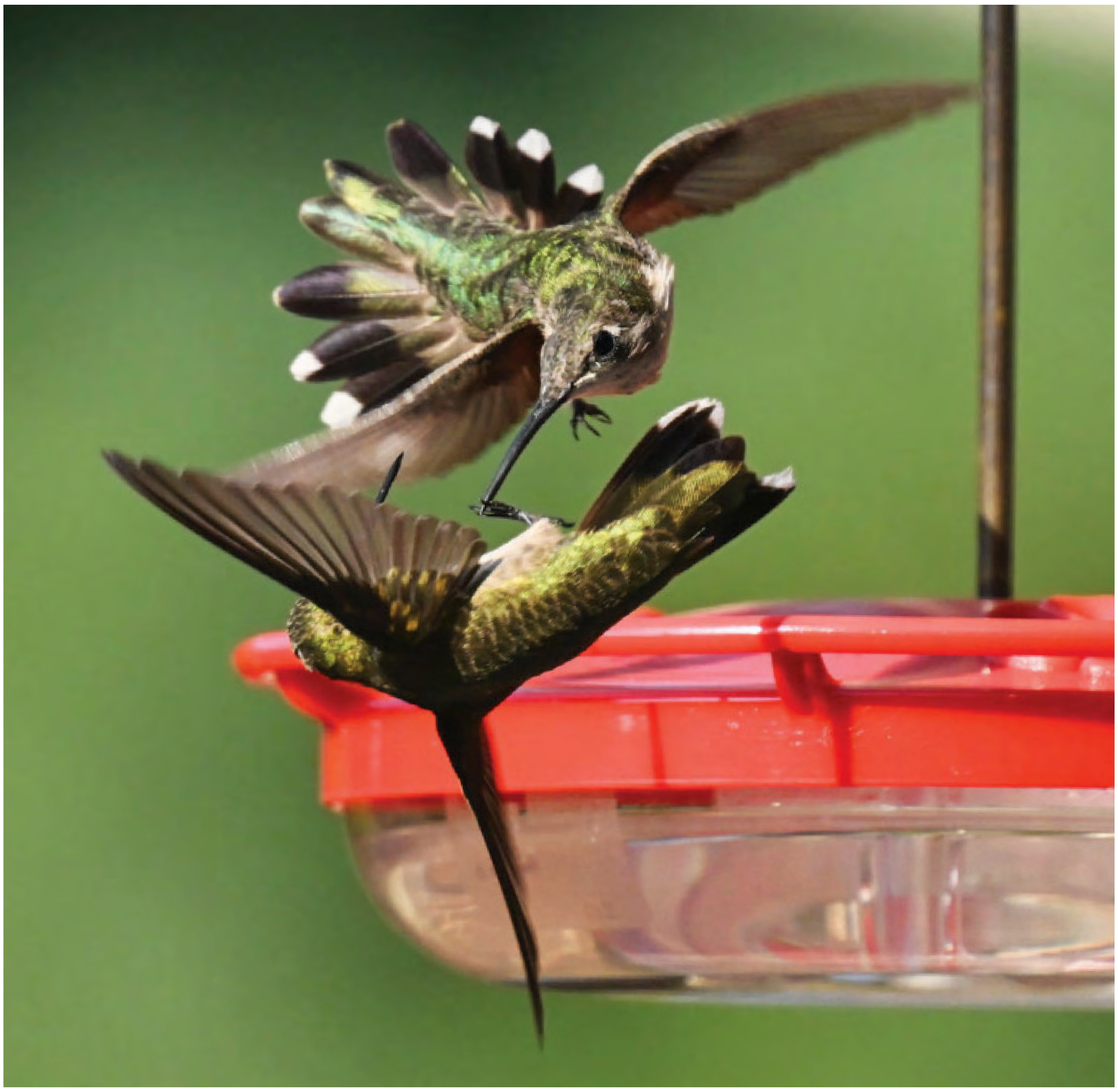
Carol Holliday ROBINSON, IL

FINALIST

2024 HUMMINGBIRD
PHOTO CONTEST

LI'L FOODIES

Hummingbirds consume half their body weight daily, visiting up to 2,000 flowers and refueling every 10 to 15 minutes.

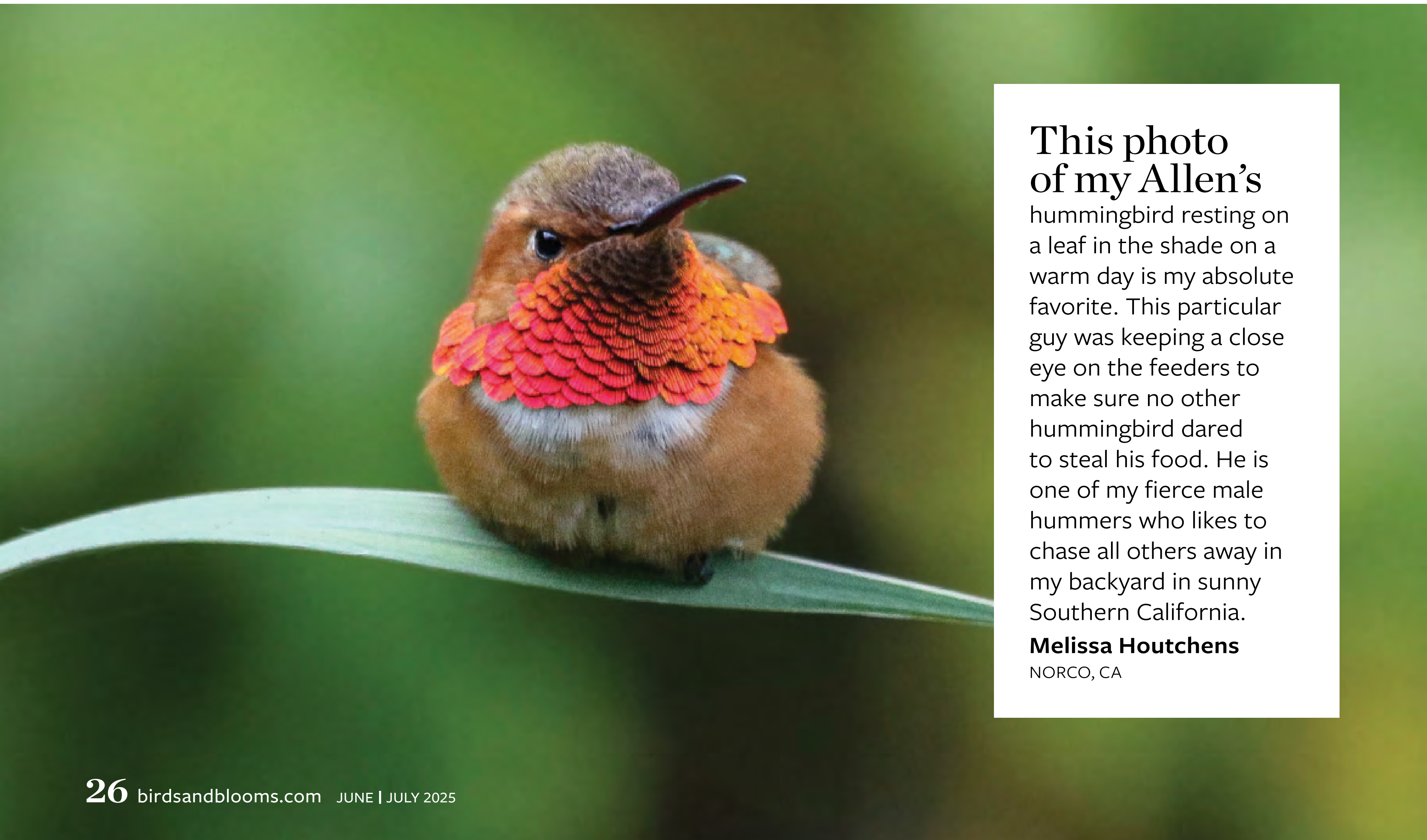


In the midst of the southern

ruby-throated hummingbird migration, I was watching the airshow from my back porch. Three juveniles were contesting ownership of the feeder outside my kitchen window, and two of them were kind enough to pose for this picture. I've seen many of their antics, but I've never seen one fend off a beak with its foot.

Bill Kearney LEXINGTON, KY

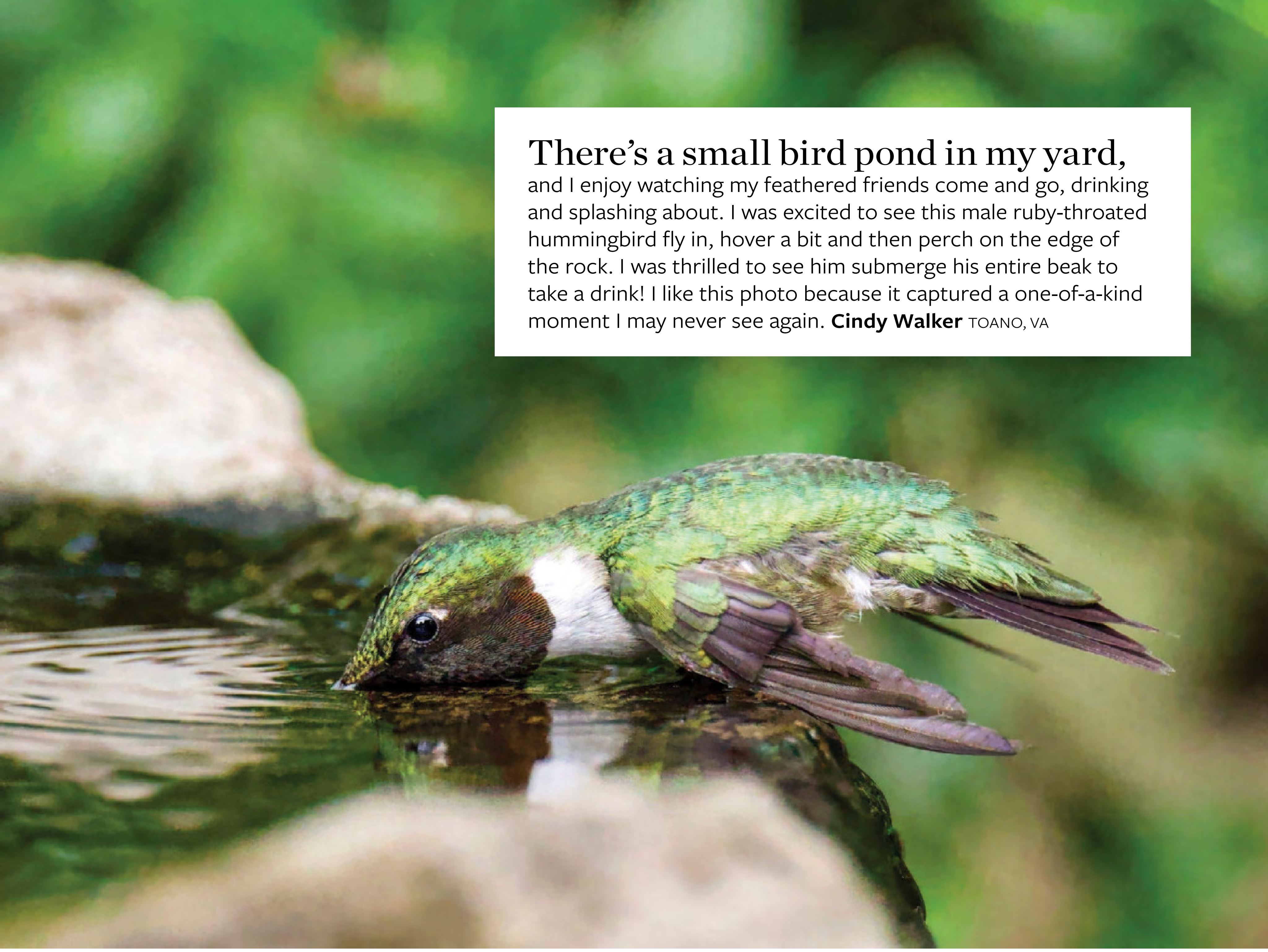
TINY TITANS
Hummingbirds may be small in size, but they're fierce when it comes to defending their turf.



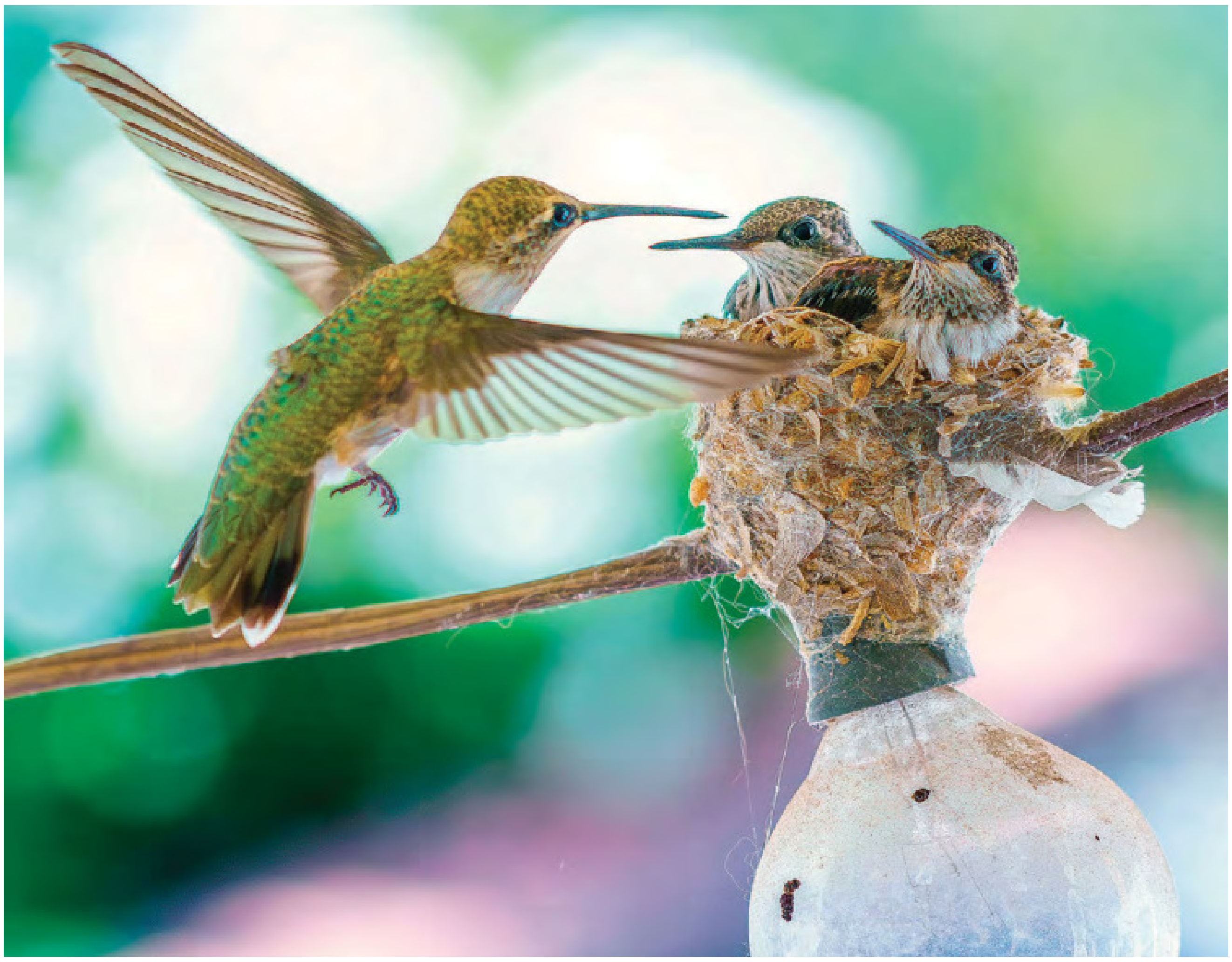
This photo of my Allen's

hummingbird resting on a leaf in the shade on a warm day is my absolute favorite. This particular guy was keeping a close eye on the feeders to make sure no other hummingbird dared to steal his food. He is one of my fierce male hummers who likes to chase all others away in my backyard in sunny Southern California.

Melissa Houtchens
NORCO, CA

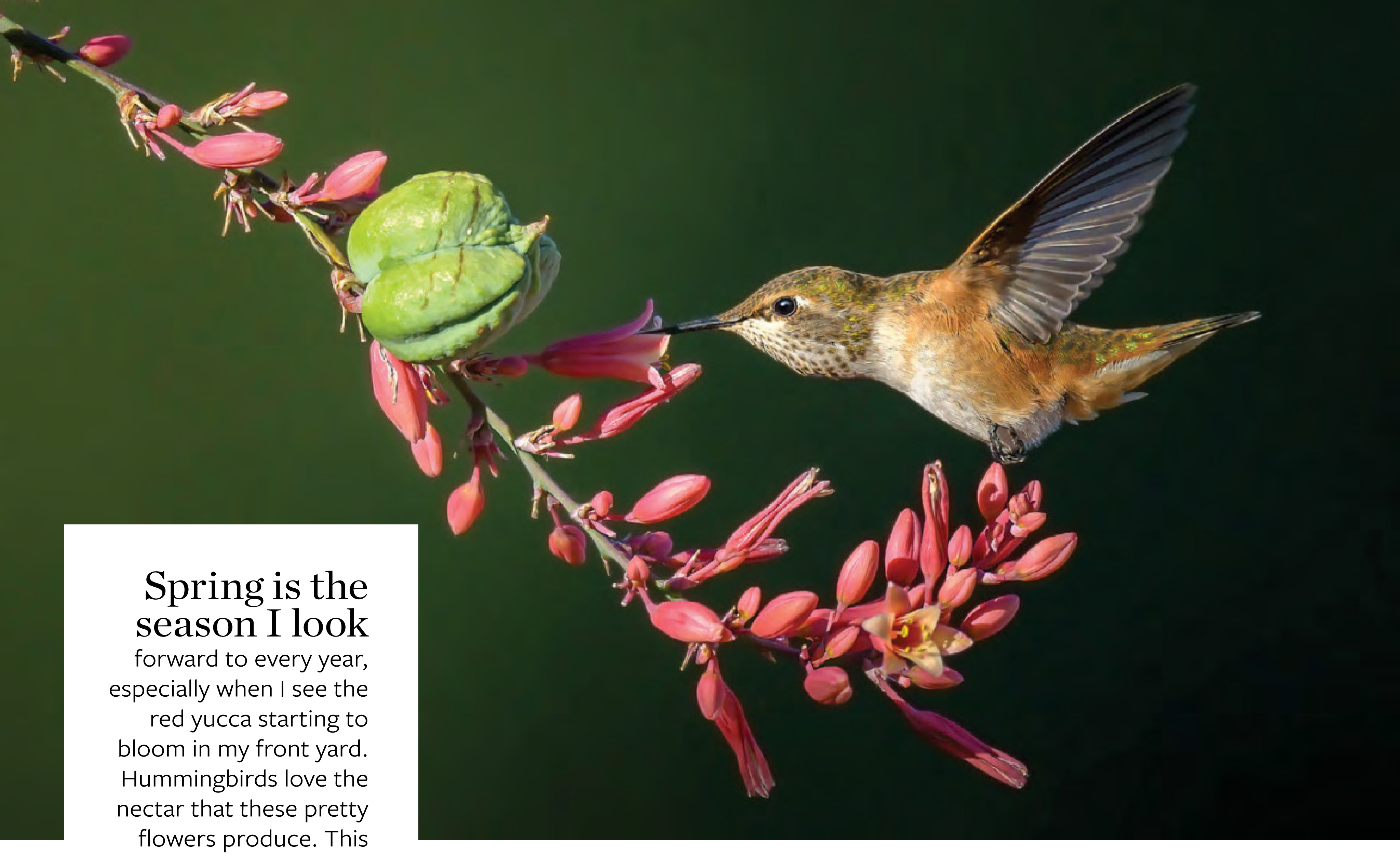


There's a small bird pond in my yard, and I enjoy watching my feathered friends come and go, drinking and splashing about. I was excited to see this male ruby-throated hummingbird fly in, hover a bit and then perch on the edge of the rock. I was thrilled to see him submerge his entire beak to take a drink! I like this photo because it captured a one-of-a-kind moment I may never see again. **Cindy Walker** TOANO, VA



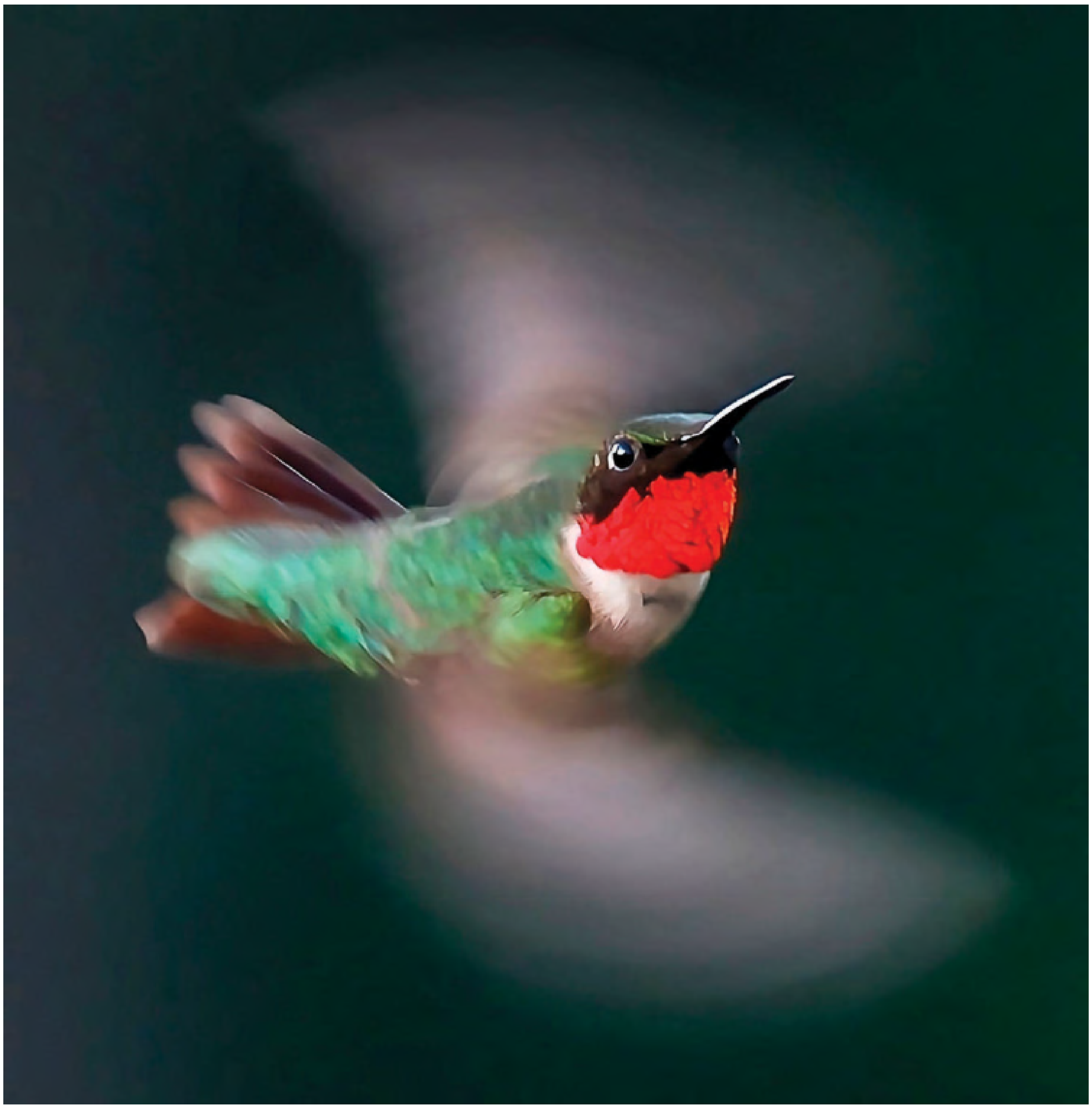
I went away for three weeks to visit my grandkids. When I came back, a mother black-chinned hummingbird had turned a light bulb on my back porch into her cozy nest. A week later, she had two babies. After about a month, she returned to her nest and laid two more eggs! Hopefully, my grandkids will get to see her second brood.

Terry Scott RIO RANCHO, NM



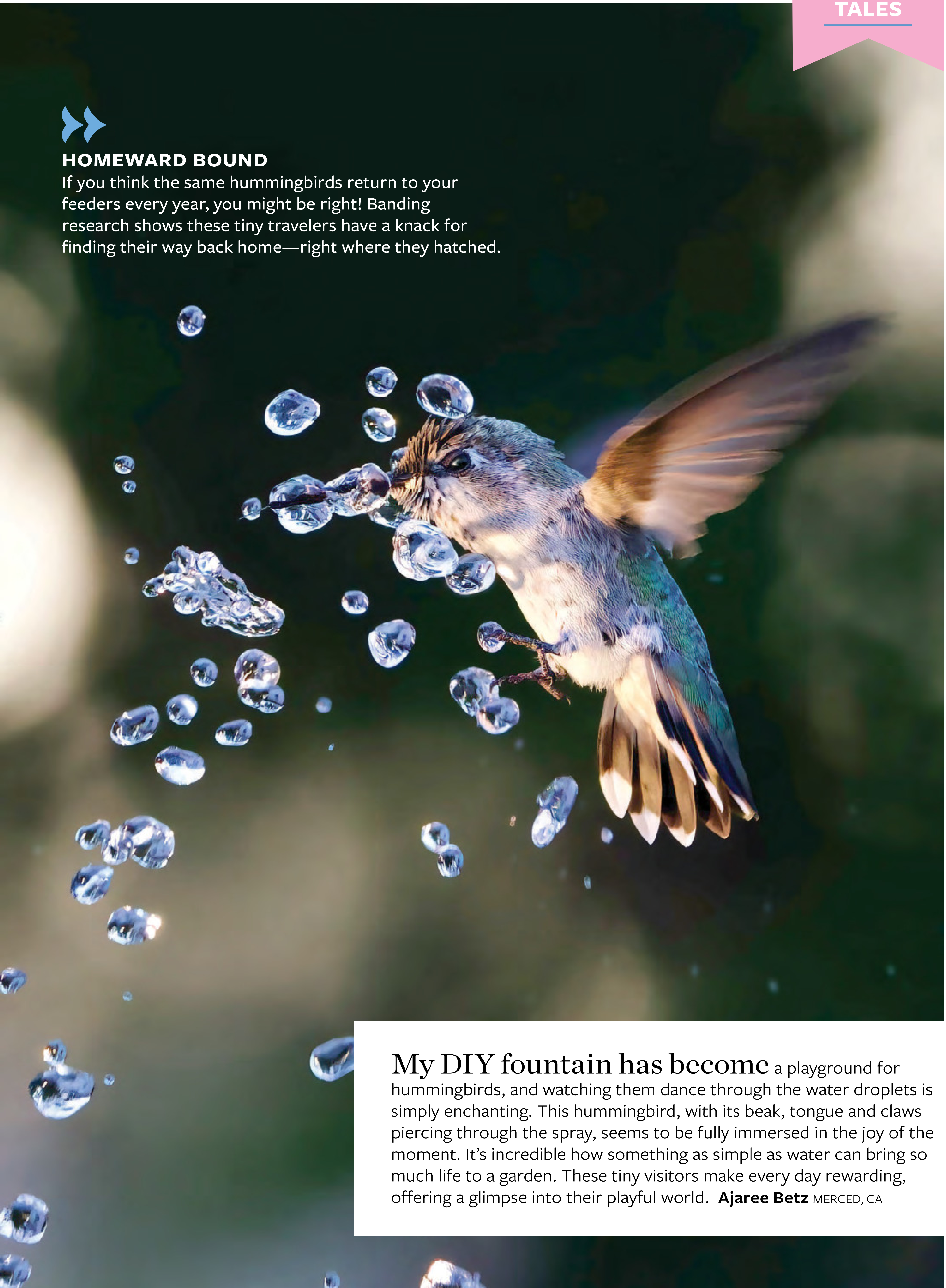
Spring is the season I look forward to every year, especially when I see the red yucca starting to bloom in my front yard. Hummingbirds love the nectar that these pretty flowers produce. This beautiful female rufous hummingbird would sit and relax momentarily before dashing off, only to come back for yet another quick pit stop. The rufous hummingbirds migrate to my area in Northern California, and I love photographing them.

Debra Witt BUTTE VALLEY, CA



I captured this ruby-throated hummingbird during the summer. The hummer was zipping back and forth to the feeder, and I wanted to capture those wings in action. I used a very slow shutter speed. Anyone can take a great picture at a higher shutter speed, but the challenge was to capture the tiny bird in focus at a slower speed.

Travis Boyd LEBANON, PA



HOMEWARD BOUND

If you think the same hummingbirds return to your feeders every year, you might be right! Banding research shows these tiny travelers have a knack for finding their way back home—right where they hatched.

My DIY fountain has become a playground for hummingbirds, and watching them dance through the water droplets is simply enchanting. This hummingbird, with its beak, tongue and claws piercing through the spray, seems to be fully immersed in the joy of the moment. It's incredible how something as simple as water can bring so much life to a garden. These tiny visitors make every day rewarding, offering a glimpse into their playful world. **Ajaree Betz** MERCED, CA

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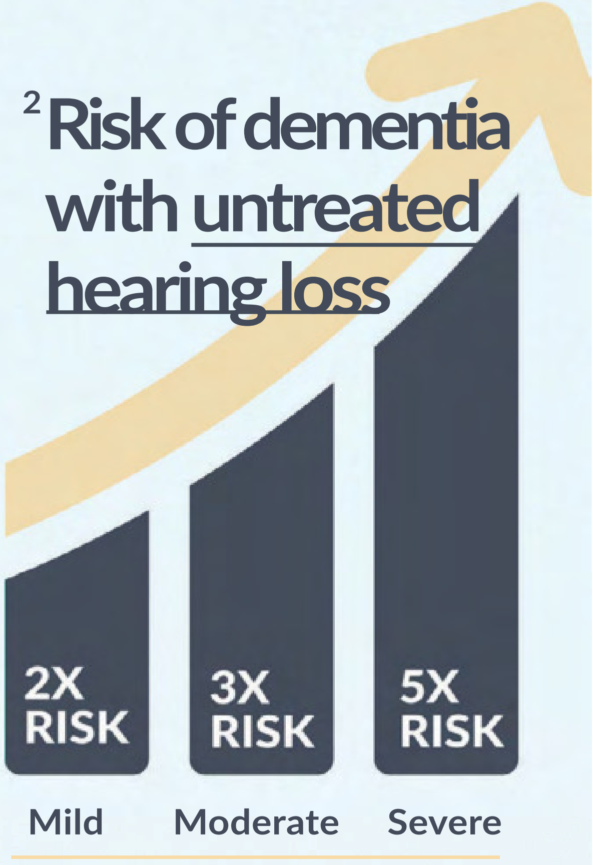
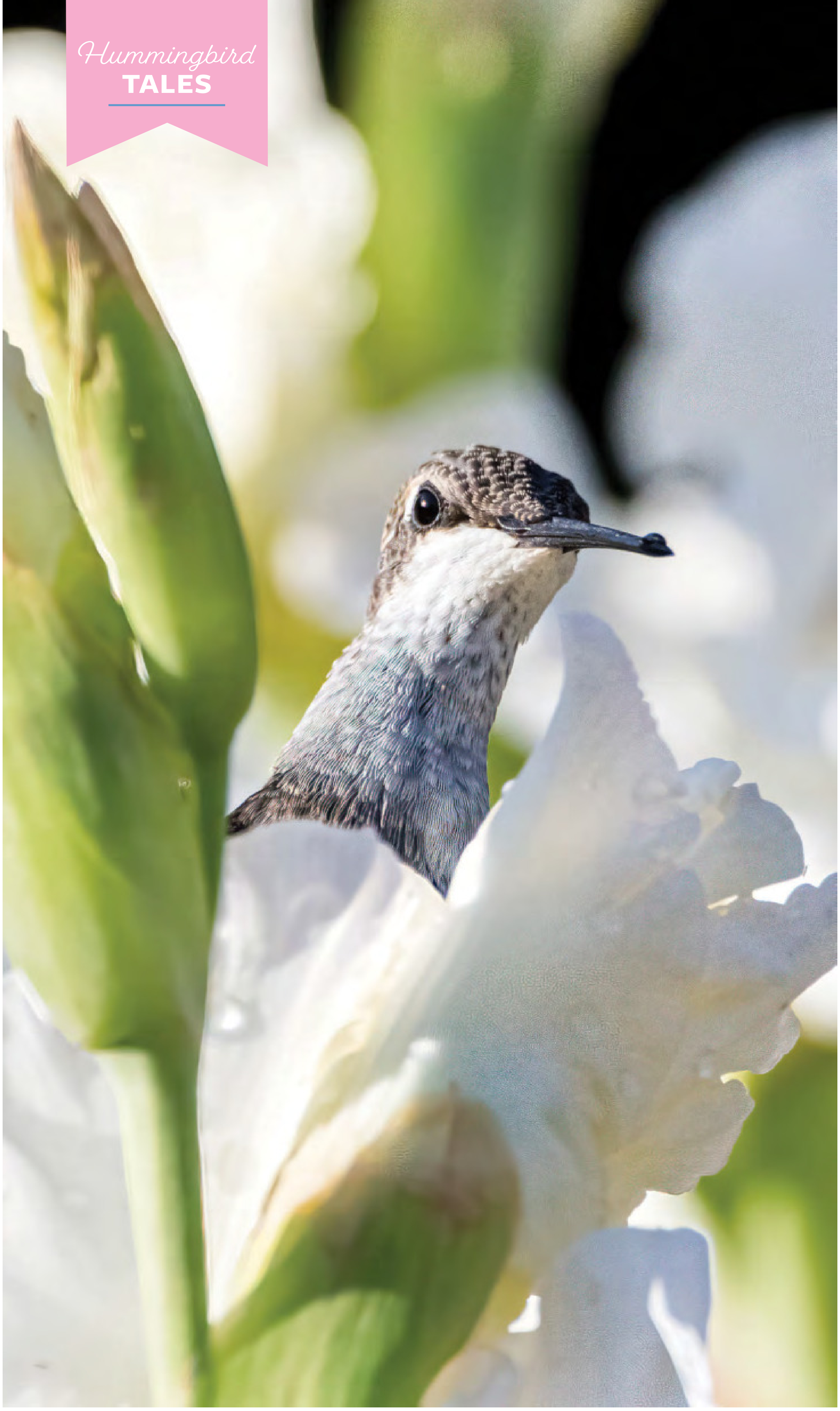
[1] decreased risk of dementia with hearing aids

[2] Risk of dementia with untreated hearing loss



1. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health: New Study Links Dementia With Hearing Loss In Older Adults 2. Johns Hopkins Medicine: The Hidden Risks of Hearing Loss



After a substantial overnight storm, I woke up early to see if things were OK outside, and I took my camera with me because you never know if a photo opportunity will come up. There were beautiful raindrops on the flowers, and this female black-chinned hummingbird was sitting in the gladiolus, enjoying a little rest among the blooms. It looked at me as if saying, “Peekaboo, I see you!” I used a Canon EOS 80D with a 150-600mm Sigma lens to capture this photo. **Linda Johnson** WALLA WALLA, WA

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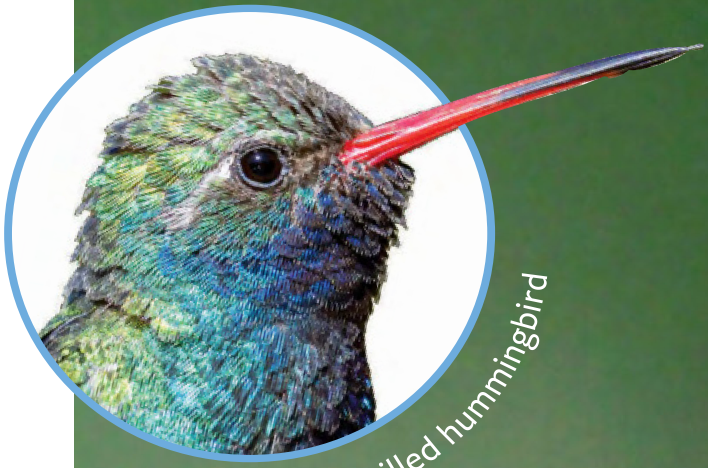
ULTIMATE GUIDE TO Hummingbirds



Broad-billed hummingbird

Anna’s hummingbird

Calliope hummingbird

Enjoy the whirr of tiny wings when you create a space that these majestic fliers want to return to again and again

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM RIGHT: BALL HORTICULTURAL COMPANY; WWW.PROVENWINNERS.COM (2); DELLA ALCORN; GERALD CORSI/GETTY IMAGES; LISA SWANSON; PHIL SEU PHOTOGRAPHY/GETTY IMAGES

Eye-Catching Red Blooms

Famously drawn to crimson nectar sources, hummingbirds stop for sips at these beauties

1. Columbine
ZONES 3 TO 8

2. Scarlet bee balm
ZONES 4 TO 9

3. Mandevilla
ZONES 10 TO 11, ANNUAL ELSEWHERE

4. Firecracker penstemon
ZONES 4 TO 9

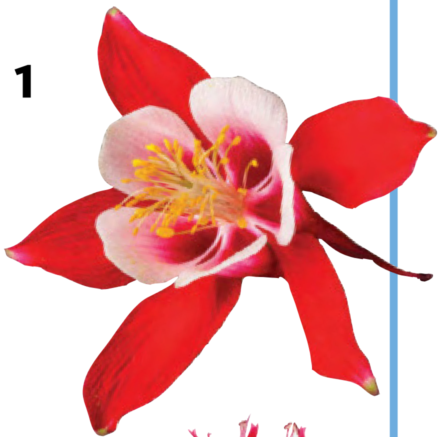
5. Red yucca
ZONES 6 TO 10

6. Cardinal flower
ZONES 3 TO 9

7. Scarlet sage
ZONES 8 TO 10, ANNUAL ELSEWHERE

8. California fuchsia
ZONES 8 TO 11

1



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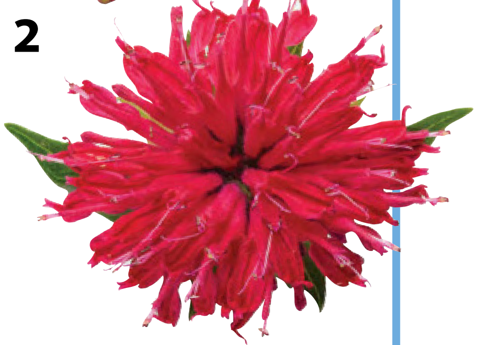

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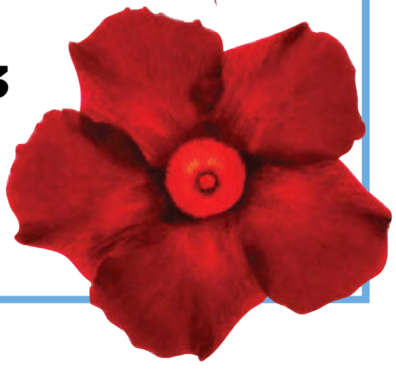


Tried-and-True Plant Picks

Readers share the blooms hummingbirds love most in their backyards

Hummingbirds love to hover around our canna lilies and enjoy the nectar. Once the flowers bloom, the birds go to them instead of the feeder. **Robert and Lois Hammond** LEONARDO, NJ

Every year I buy a big, beautiful ivy geranium to hang in front of my living room window. The hummingbirds love the nectar and perching on the vines. **Sue Williams** SCAPPOOSE, OR

My ruby-throated hummingbirds are addicted to Vermillionaire firecracker plant! **Helen Gorski** STANHOPE, NJ

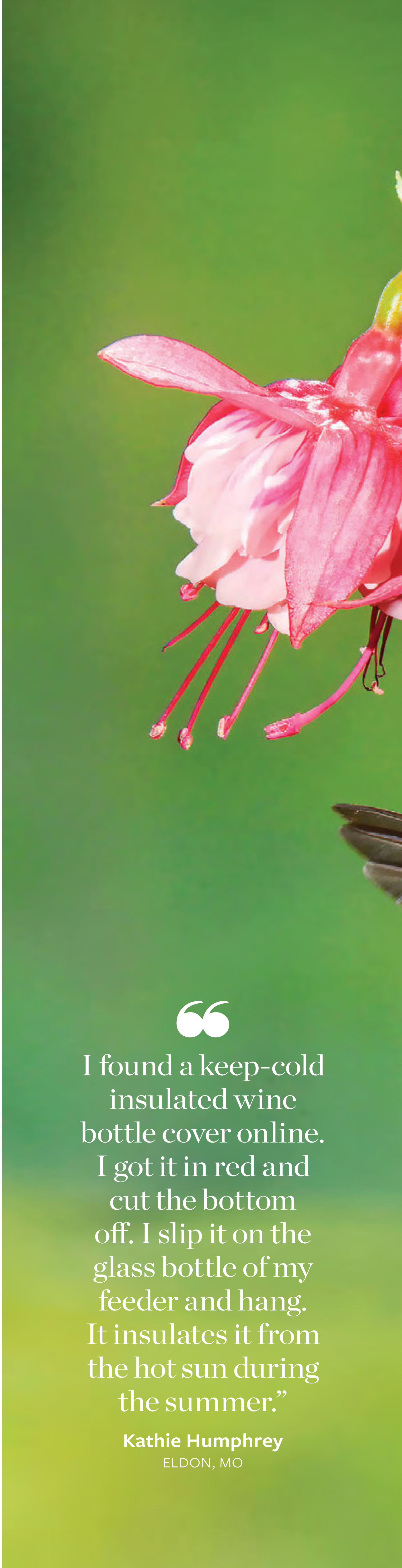
The best plant to attract hummingbirds for us is the Hot Lips salvia. It blooms from May through November and will overwinter if the temperature is above 26 degrees. It continually blooms, and Anna's hummingbirds visit many times each day. **Katie Goodwin** PORTLAND, OR

My hummingbirds love orange, red and yellow trumpet vines. The birds get territorial and try to keep any oncoming hummers away. **Betty Skrzypek** NIAGARA FALLS, NY

My neighbor always had hummingbirds, so I asked her what the secret was. Her response was flame acanthus. As soon as I planted one, hummers came. I've also planted Turk's cap and autumn sage. They bloom into fall when we get lots of migrants. **Beth Hamaty** ABILENE, TX

Lantana (invasive in some areas) attracts the most hummingbirds, plus butterflies and bees. It grows large and hearty, and they all love it. **Roberta Calgaro** CLEMMONS, NC

Hummingbirds mainly stay close to a nearby mountain with the cover of trees, but during summer and fall migration they drop into town more regularly. I watched for several weeks as waves of hummies enjoyed the same red penstemon and a group of cut-and-come-again zinnias. **Rachel Spear** CASPER, WY



> "I found a keep-cold insulated wine bottle cover online. I got it in red and cut the bottom off. I slip it on the glass bottle of my feeder and hang. It insulates it from the hot sun during the summer."
>
> **Kathie Humphrey**
> ELDON, MO

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: BIRDIMAGES, PHIL SEU PHOTOGRAPHY/GETTY IMAGES (2); WWW.PROVENWINNERS.COM; OLEKSANDR KOSTIUCHENKO/SHUTTERSTOCK; WWW.PROVENWINNERS.COM (2)

Female Anna's hummingbird at fuchsia

Male rufous hummingbird

CLEVER TIPS FOR CLEANING FEEDERS

I rinse my feeders with vinegar, and they stay clean. I rinse them every time I change the food. It's so easy and works well.

Mattie Stillwell TENAHA, TX

I don't mind cleaning my hummingbird feeders except for all those little yellow bee guards. I found an easy way to do it, though. Take any empty juice bottle that has a wide opening and add 3 cups of water along with ⅛ cup bleach. Add the bee guards, replace the cap and shake. Then let it sit for five minutes and shake again. Once you take them out and rinse them well, you will have clean bee guards.

Marija Domijan ST. LOUIS, MO

My feeder is tall, and I don't have a brush big enough to clean it. I simply pour in vinegar, add uncooked barley and shake! The feeder is sparkling in no time! Put the mixture into a strainer so that you can save the barley for next time. Then rinse the feeder well with hot water till the water runs clear from the bottle. Add your fresh nectar, and your precious hummers will thank you!

Susan Devries
JACKSONVILLE, AR

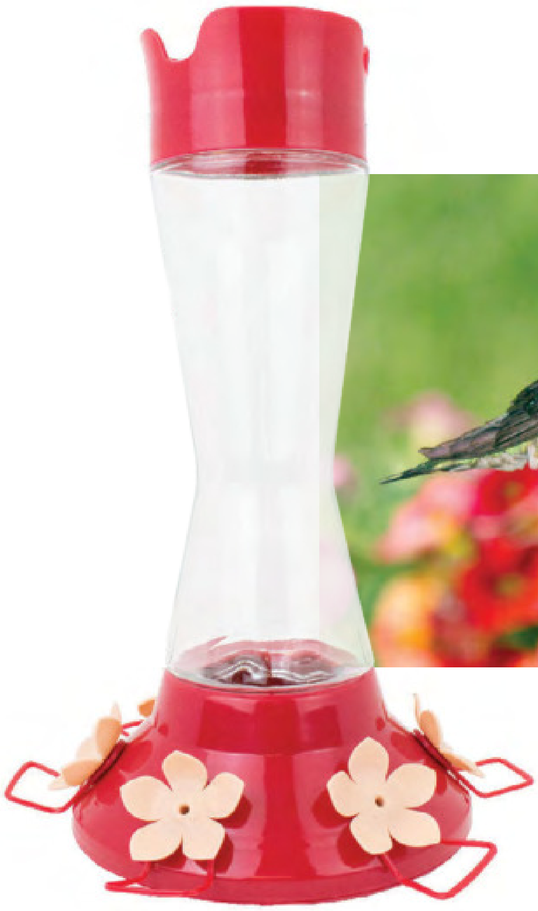
Keep the Peace

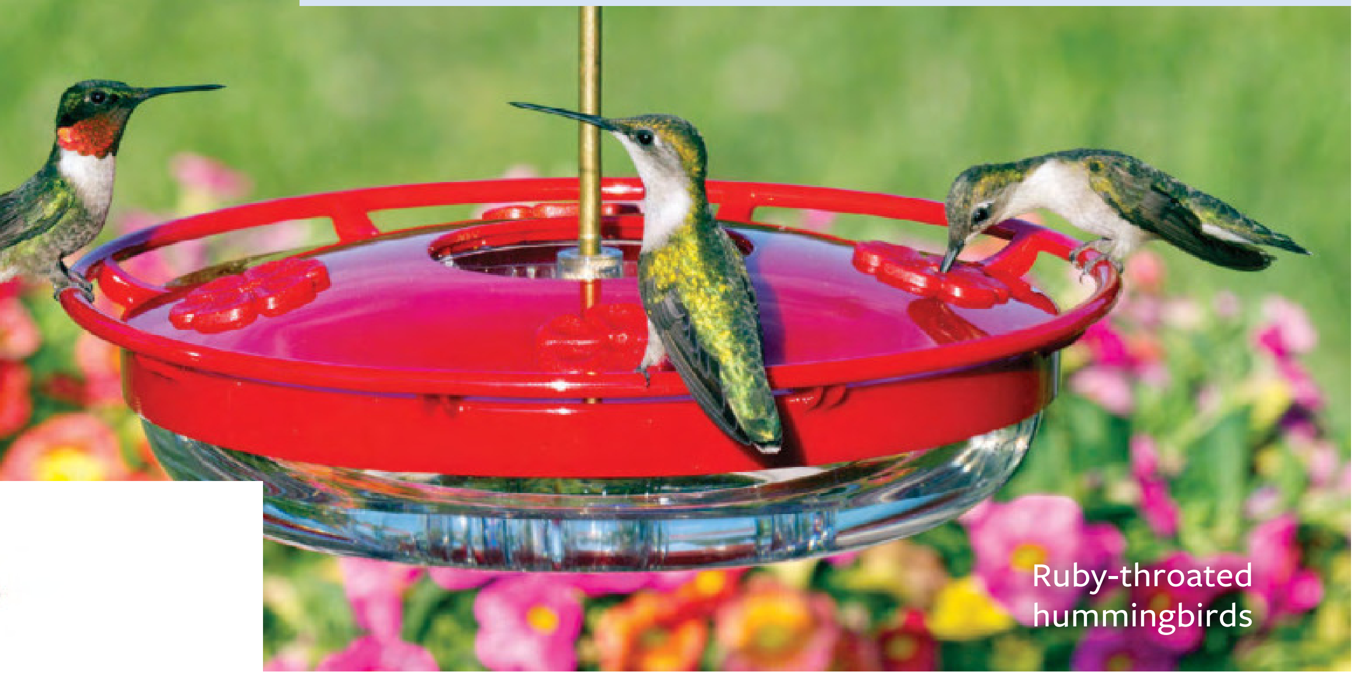
Hummingbirds may get territorial in summer. Add another sugar water feeder when migration increases to help keep male hummingbirds from fighting for space.

Broad-tailed hummingbirds

CHOOSING A FEEDER

The right feeder for you is the one that you find easy to fill, clean and hang. The traditional glass bottle that threads into a plastic basin or the saucer style are both recommended by bird experts Kenn and Kimberly Kaufman.





Ruby-throated hummingbirds

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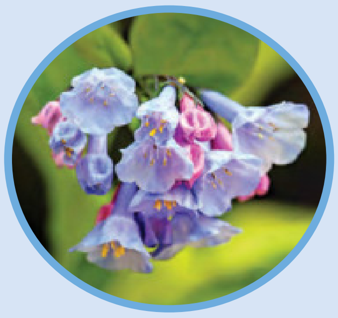
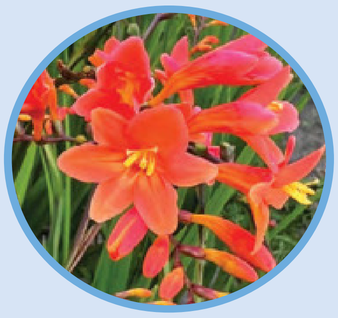
BALL HORTICULTURAL COMPANY; WALTERS GARDENS INC.; NANCY SILVERMAN-WEEKS; ASPECTS, INC (2); RICHARDSSEELEY/GETTY IMAGES; MANJINDER PAPIAL

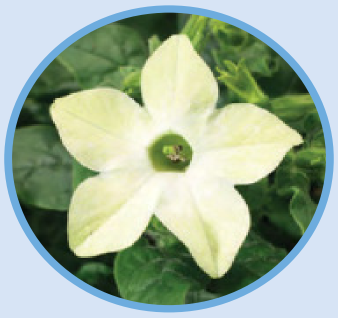
10 TUBULAR FLOWERS FOR HUMMERS



1. Virginia bluebells
ZONES 3 TO 9

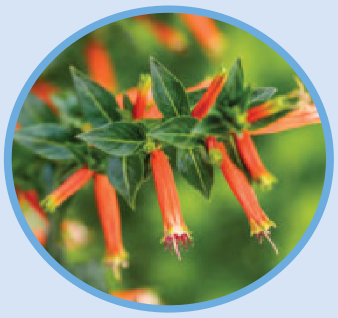
2. Crocosmia
ZONES 5 TO 9

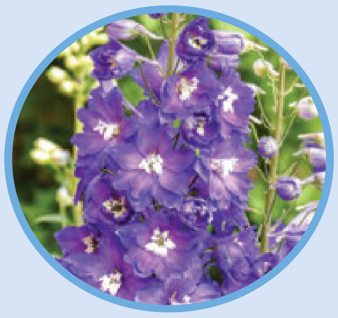




3. Flowering tobacco ANNUAL

4. Firecracker plant
ZONES 8 TO 11





5. Larkspur
ZONES 3 TO 7

WHEN TO START AND STOP FEEDING

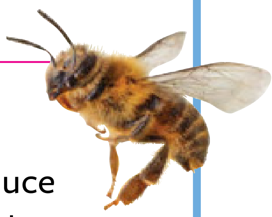
In spring, hummingbirds reach the Gulf Coast by late February or March. They typically arrive in northern states by mid-May. As hummingbirds move south in late summer and early fall, they need food sources to fuel their migration. Males tend to start the trek first, sometimes heading south as early as July. To make sure you feed any stragglers, a good rule of thumb is to leave your feeders up for a week or two after you see the last hummingbird. In milder climates, you may have hummingbirds all winter!

The Sweet Stuff

Sugar-Water Recipe

Here's how to make your own hummingbird food

1. Combine 4 parts hot water to 1 part sugar.
2. Mix until the sugar is completely dissolved.
3. Once it cools to room temperature, it's ready to go in a feeder.
4. Store any extra in the refrigerator for up to a week.

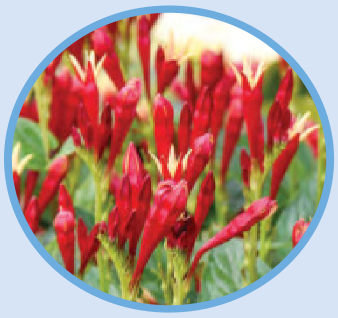


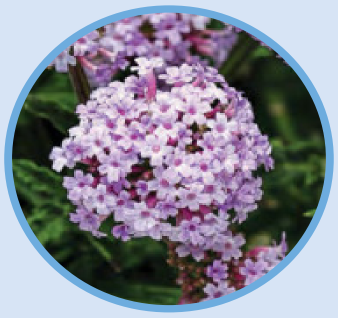
No Bees, Please

To keep bees away, reduce the ratio of sugar to water. Try 5 parts water to 1 part sugar, instead of the usual 4 to 1. Clean any spillage off the feeding ports. Since bees and wasps prefer to feed in sunny areas, try moving your feeders to a shadier area. Avoid using products such as pesticides, petroleum jelly or cooking oil on the feeding ports to discourage bees and wasps, since these substances can be deadly for hummingbirds. It's also good to remember that these insects are important pollinators, and we should protect them too. ●

6. Indian pink

ZONES 5 TO 9



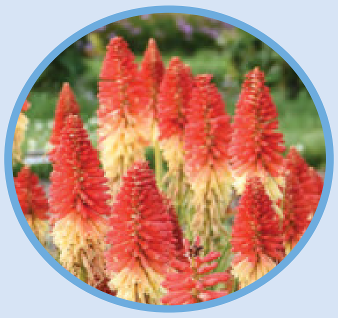


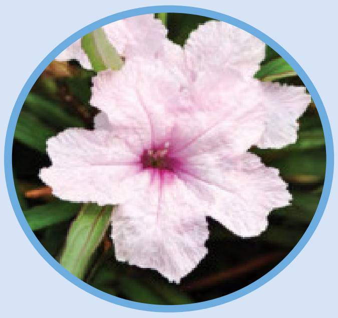
7. Tall verbena

ZONES 7 TO 11

8. Red hot poker

ZONES 5 TO 9



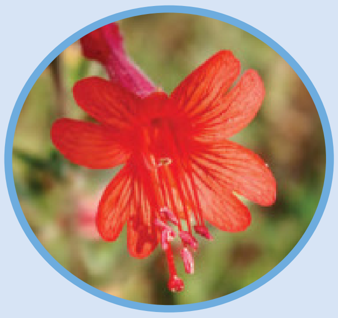


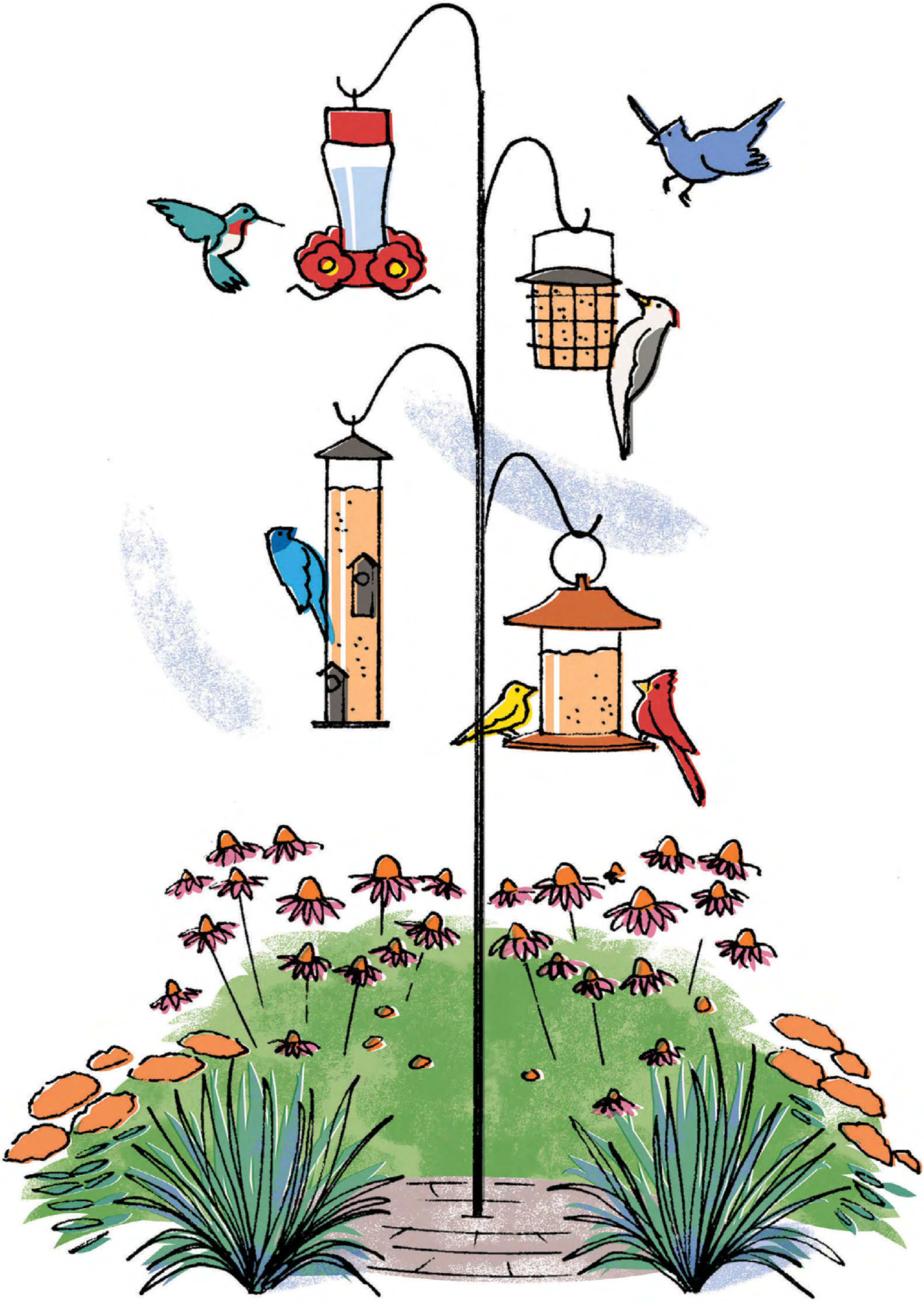
9. Wild petunia

ZONES 4 TO 8

10. Cape fuchsia

ZONES 7 TO 10





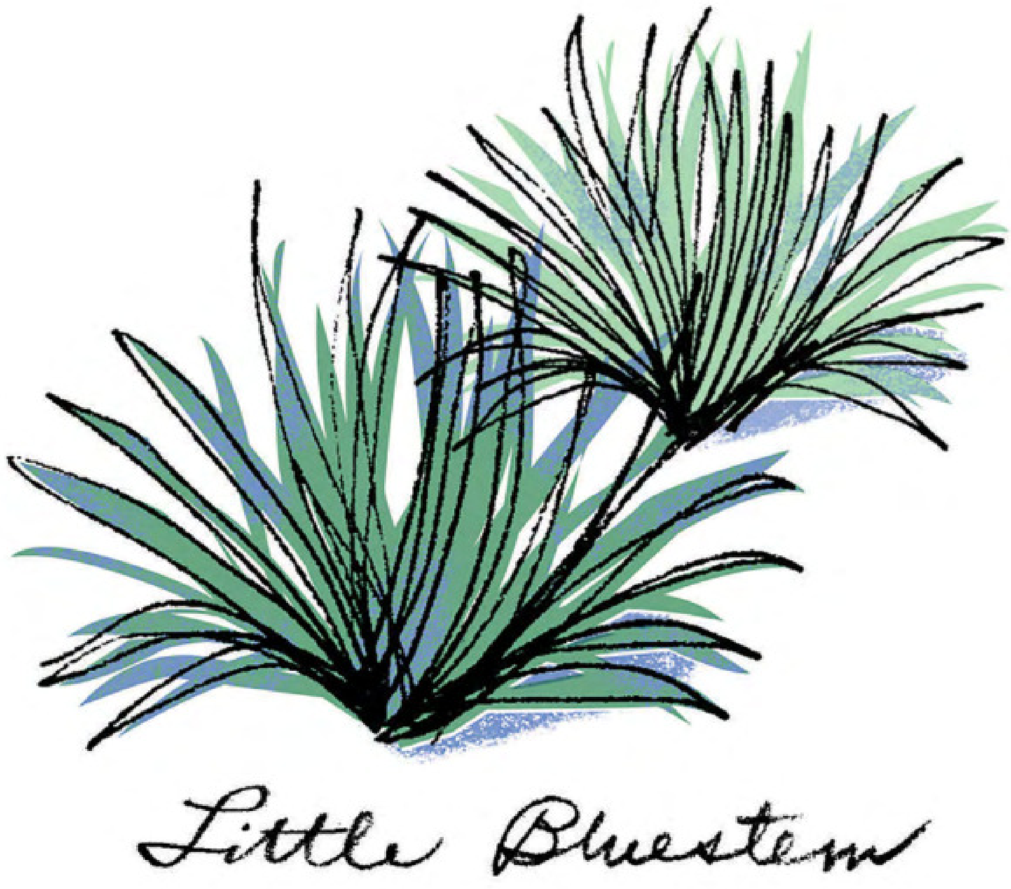
THE PERFECT PAIRING

Learn the best ways to use an abundance of blooms to attract more birds and beautify your feeder space

BY MONICA CARDOZA

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KARA FELLOWS

THERE ARE FEW CHEERIER SIGHTS THAN THAT OF LIVELY, COLORFUL birds visiting backyard feeders. That is, until your gaze moves to the brown patch below. However, by planting around it, you can create not only an eye-catching flower garden, but one that supports birds' diets. "Plants that provide seed and nectar-filled flowers are a great way to not only beautify the area, but also supplement the food you provide with feeders," says horticultural expert Melinda Myers. "Plantings are rich with insects, which some 96% of North American terrestrial birds eat as part of their diet."

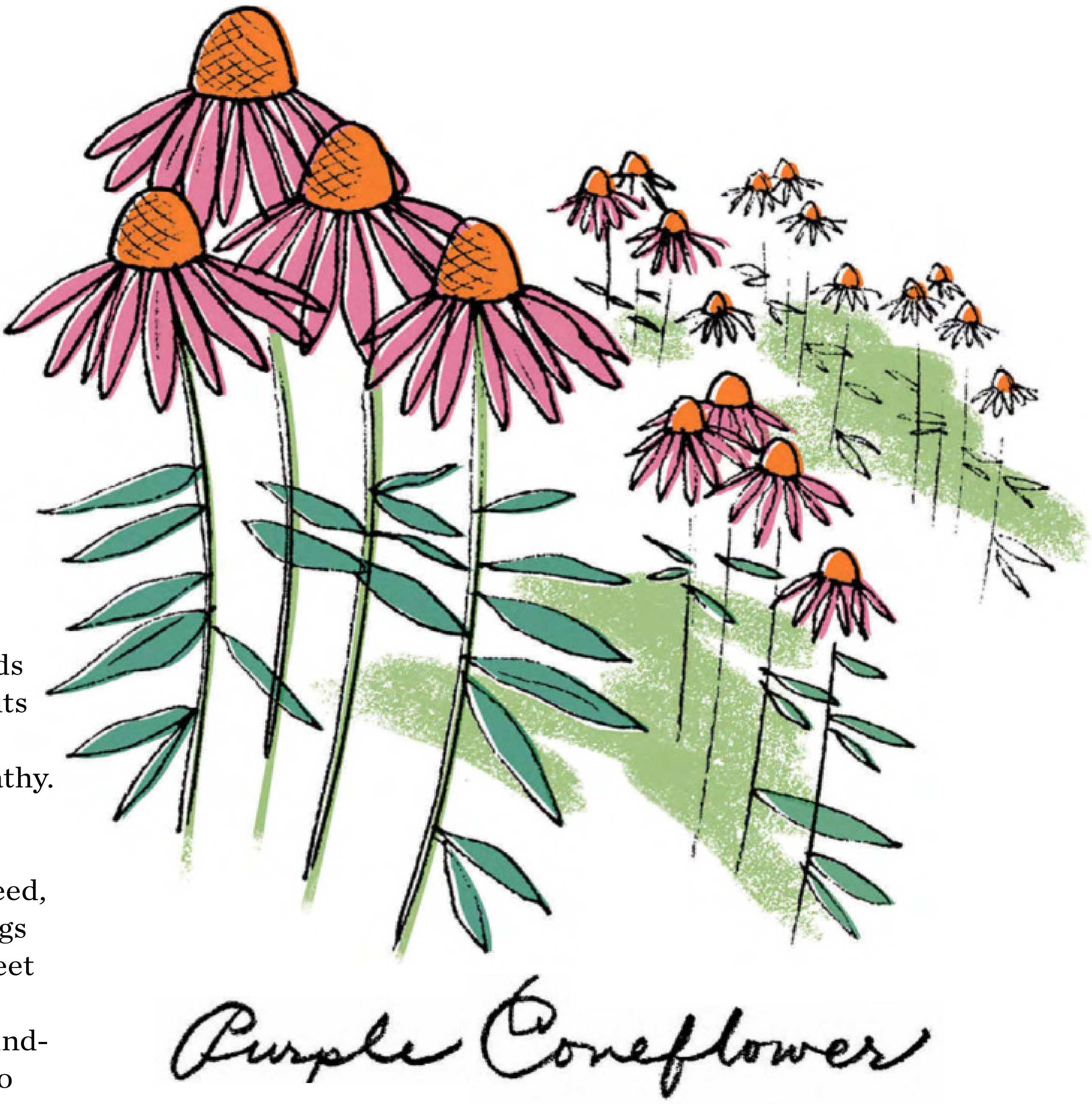


Embrace the Brown Patch

Use the area directly beneath the feeders as a template for where not to plant. Leave the ground bare, or cover it with pavers or smooth medium-sized landscaping stones. This setup makes for easy cleanup using a rake, broom or wet/dry vacuum, which is an important part of ensuring bird health.

The buildup of fecal matter, as well as wet, moldy seed hulls beneath feeders can lead to respiratory distress in birds, and bacterial diseases, says wildlife biologist Todd Schneider of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. "We recommend raking every couple days if you have a lot of feeding going on. It reduces the volume of those disease organisms, especially if there's lots of moisture." Experts also recommend wearing gloves and a mask to avoid inhaling fungal spores.

Aside from providing a healthy environment, keeping the area under feeders plant-free prevents a chemical produced from sunflower



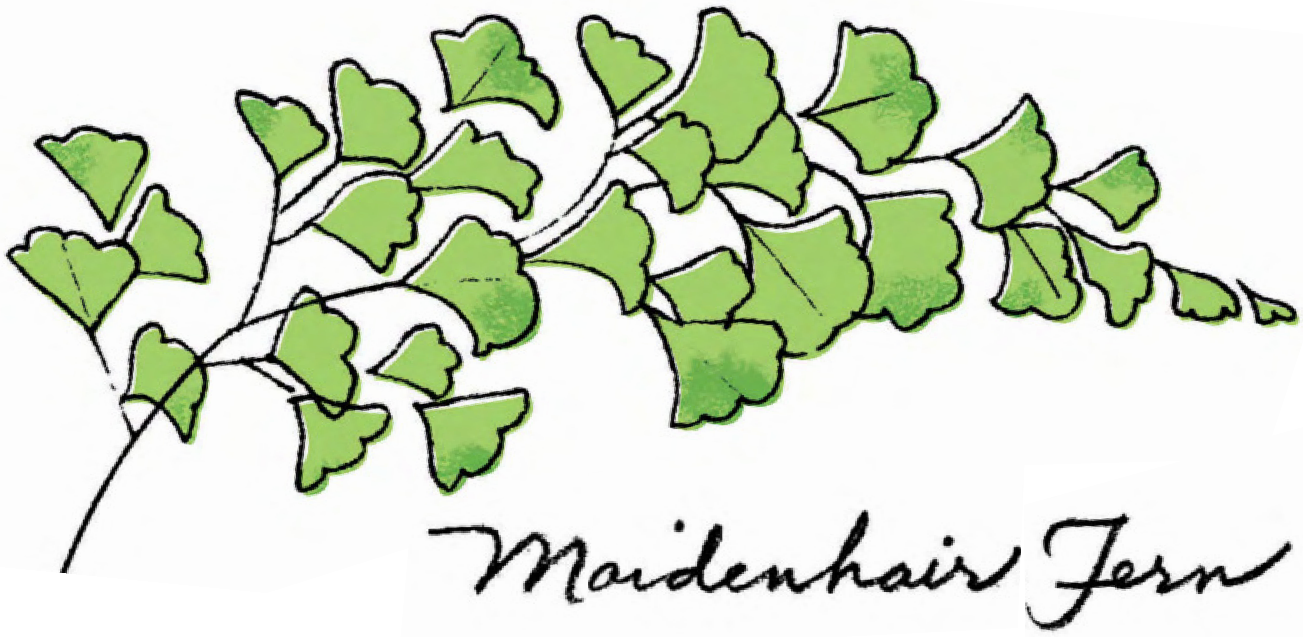
seed hulls and the plants that sprout from tossed seeds from inhibiting nearby plants from growing—a biological phenomenon called allelopathy. What's more, it's easier to pull volunteer plants from sprouting millet and milo seed, and you won't have droppings marring the plants or tiny feet and beaks tearing them up. "You reduce the risk of ground-feeding turkeys moving in to dine on the seed and damaging plants, as was my experience," Melinda says.

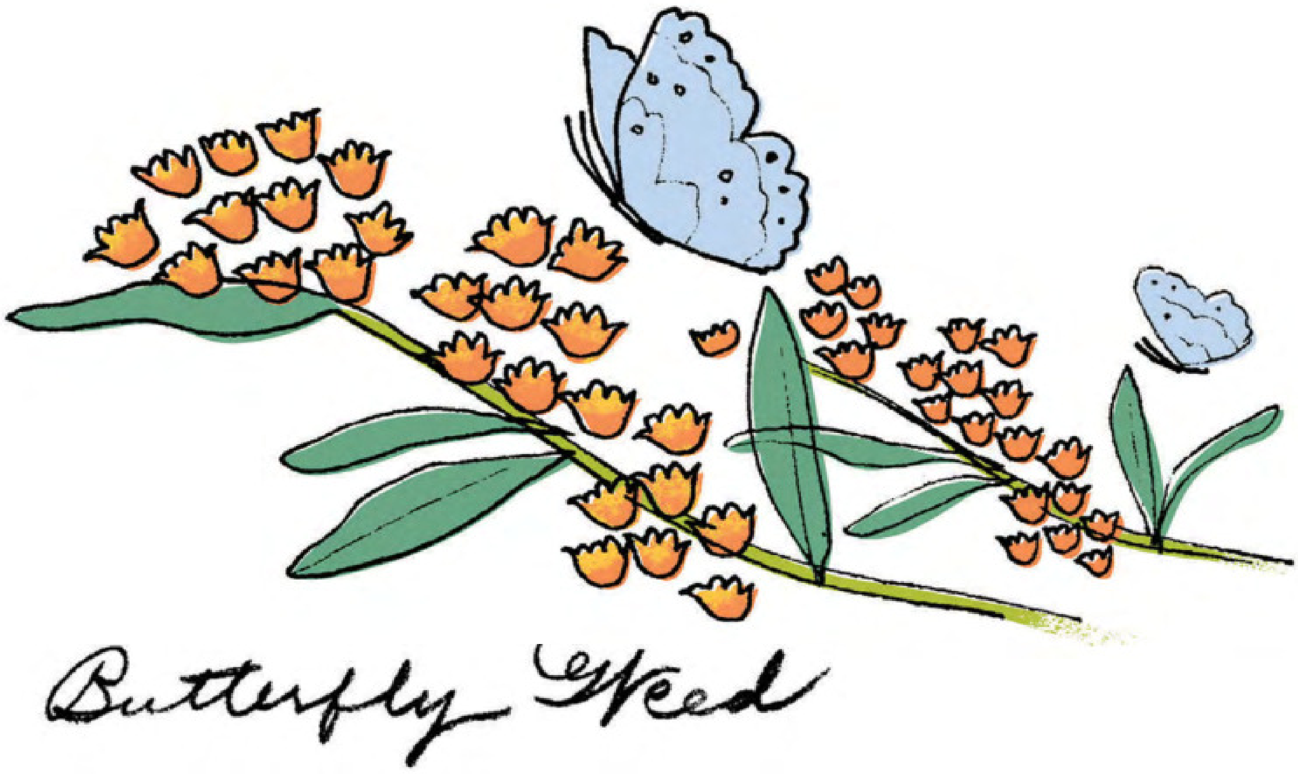
Let the Planting Begin

A bird-feeder garden features well-behaved perennial flowers, grasses and ferns planted around the area beneath the feeders. Choose relatively low-growing species that are no taller than half the height of the feeder pole at maturity to prevent squirrels from using them as launching pads to the feeders.

In addition to plant height, look for plants that thrive in available sunlight and create year-round interest for you and the birds. "Make sure you have plants that flower at different times, providing nectar for hummingbirds, orioles and pollinators," Melinda says. "Look for those that support all stages of insects, and that produce seeds, such as black-eyed Susans and blazing stars."

Before planting, leave an opening in the front that is wide enough to provide access to the feeders. Install low-growing plants such as dwarf turtlehead or little bluestem on both sides of the opening. Add mid-sized plants such as white wood aster, salvia or maidenhair fern in the center. In the back, consider slightly taller plants such as butterfly weed, prairie dropseed and purple coneflower. These suggested plants do have varying needs when it comes to sunlight, so be sure to check that they will work with the





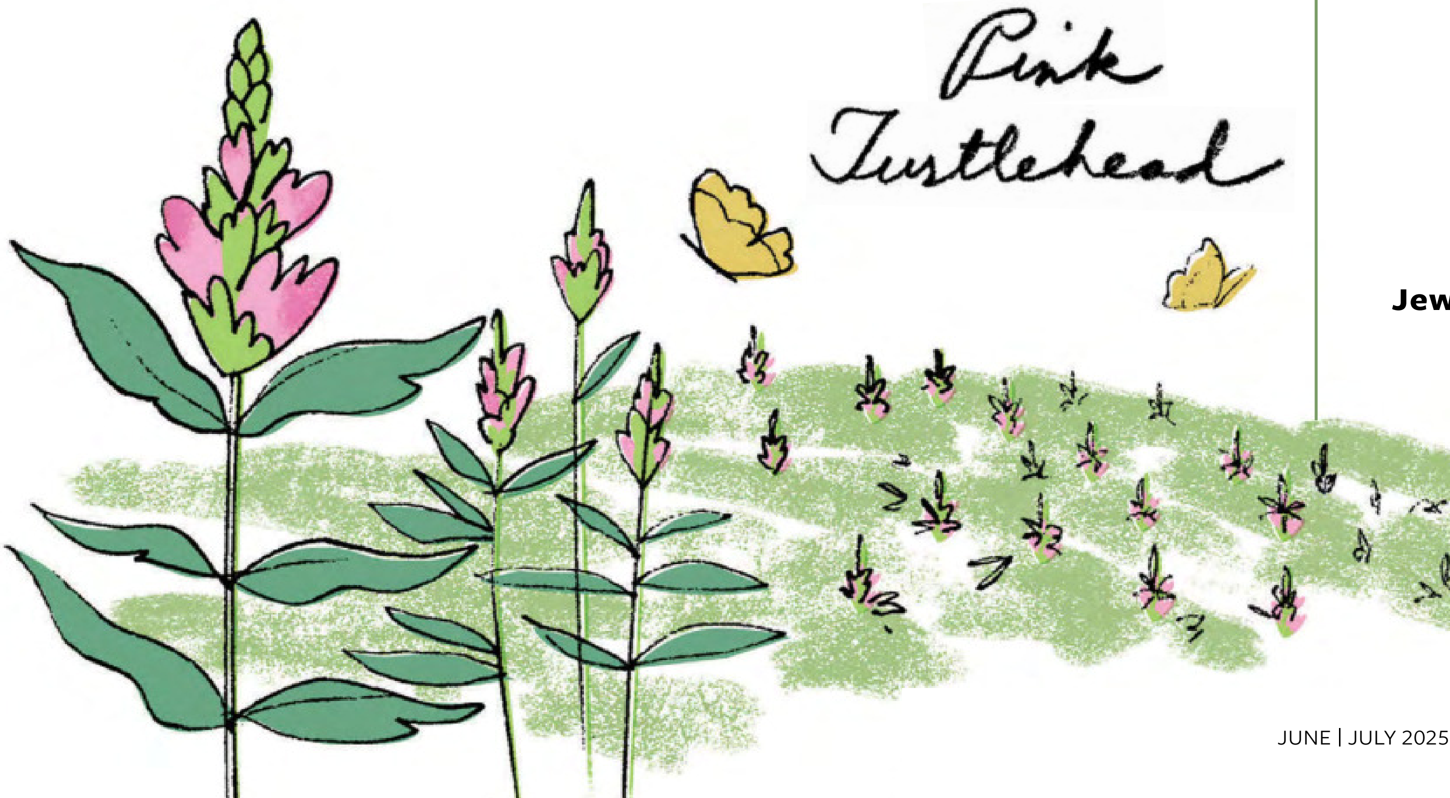
amount of light or shade that your feeder space gets.

This bird-feeder garden is meant to be airy and neat. To that end, consider installing edging to prevent surrounding grass from encroaching on the area. Space plants generously, and mulch between them. But avoid mulching over landscape fabric, Melinda says. “Organic mulch breaks down, forming compost over the barrier and allowing seeds to sprout and grow through the fabric.”

To maintain the garden, prune lower leaves to eliminate hiding spots for predators, and cut back plants growing into the area beneath the feeders. If plants get too tall, trim them. Too wide? Divide them. Leave seed heads for food later in the season and leaves for overwintering insects, such as butterflies.

Planting a garden around your feeders provides birds with food in one spot year-round, from purchased seed in the coldest months to insects in spring and summer to seed heads in fall and winter. What’s more, it transforms the often bare ground into a vibrant, harmonious space that complements the colorful birds above. ●

Monica Cardoza gardens in New Jersey where her favorite plant beneath her bird feeders is hummingbird magnet cardinal flower.



Nectar Treats

Attract hummingbirds to your bird-feeder garden with these plants:

Cardinal flower
Zones 3 to 9

Dwarf hairy beardtongue
Zones 3 to 8

Columbine Zones 3 to 8

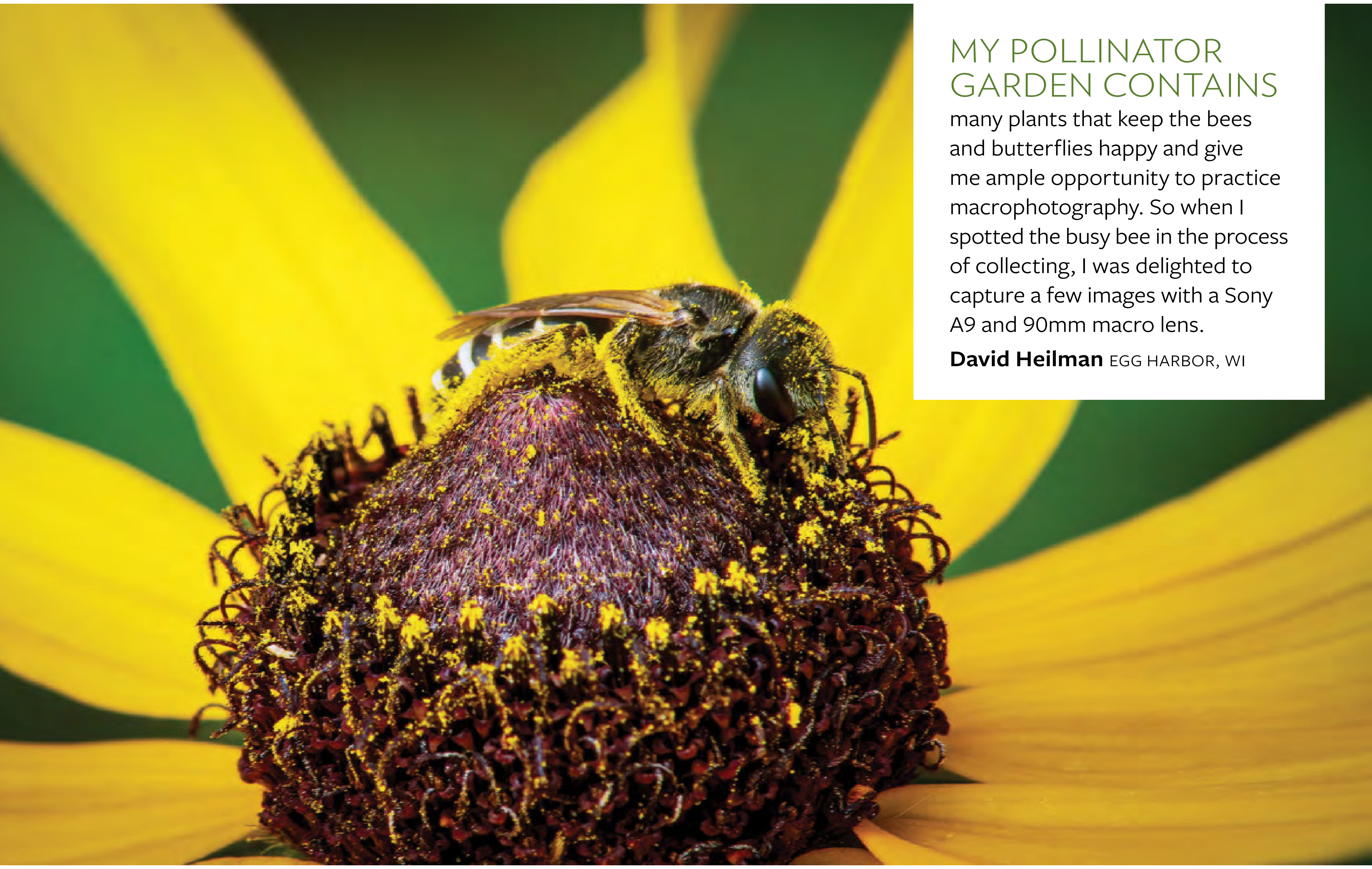
Phlox Zones 3 to 9

Jewelweed Zones 2 to 11

SIDEBAR FROM TOP: BALL HORTICULTURAL COMPANY; GREENS AND BLUES/SHUTTERSTOCK; BALL HORTICULTURAL COMPANY (2); BRIAN WOOLMAN/GETTY IMAGES

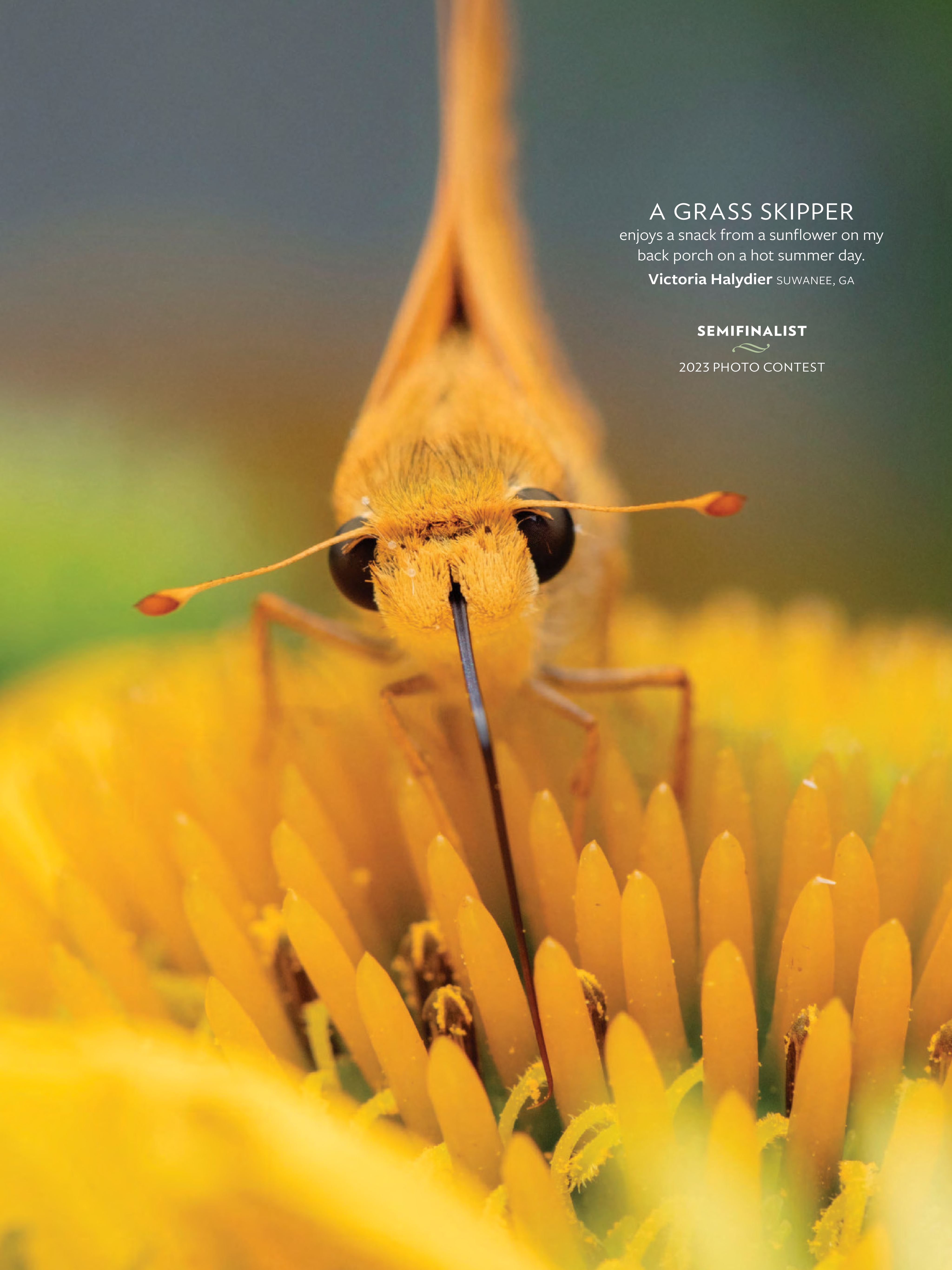
DOING IMPORTANT WORK

Readers share photos and show appreciation for tiny pollinator powerhouses that play a huge role in supporting biodiversity and keeping ecosystems healthy



MY POLLINATOR GARDEN CONTAINS many plants that keep the bees and butterflies happy and give me ample opportunity to practice macrophotography. So when I spotted the busy bee in the process of collecting, I was delighted to capture a few images with a Sony A9 and 90mm macro lens.

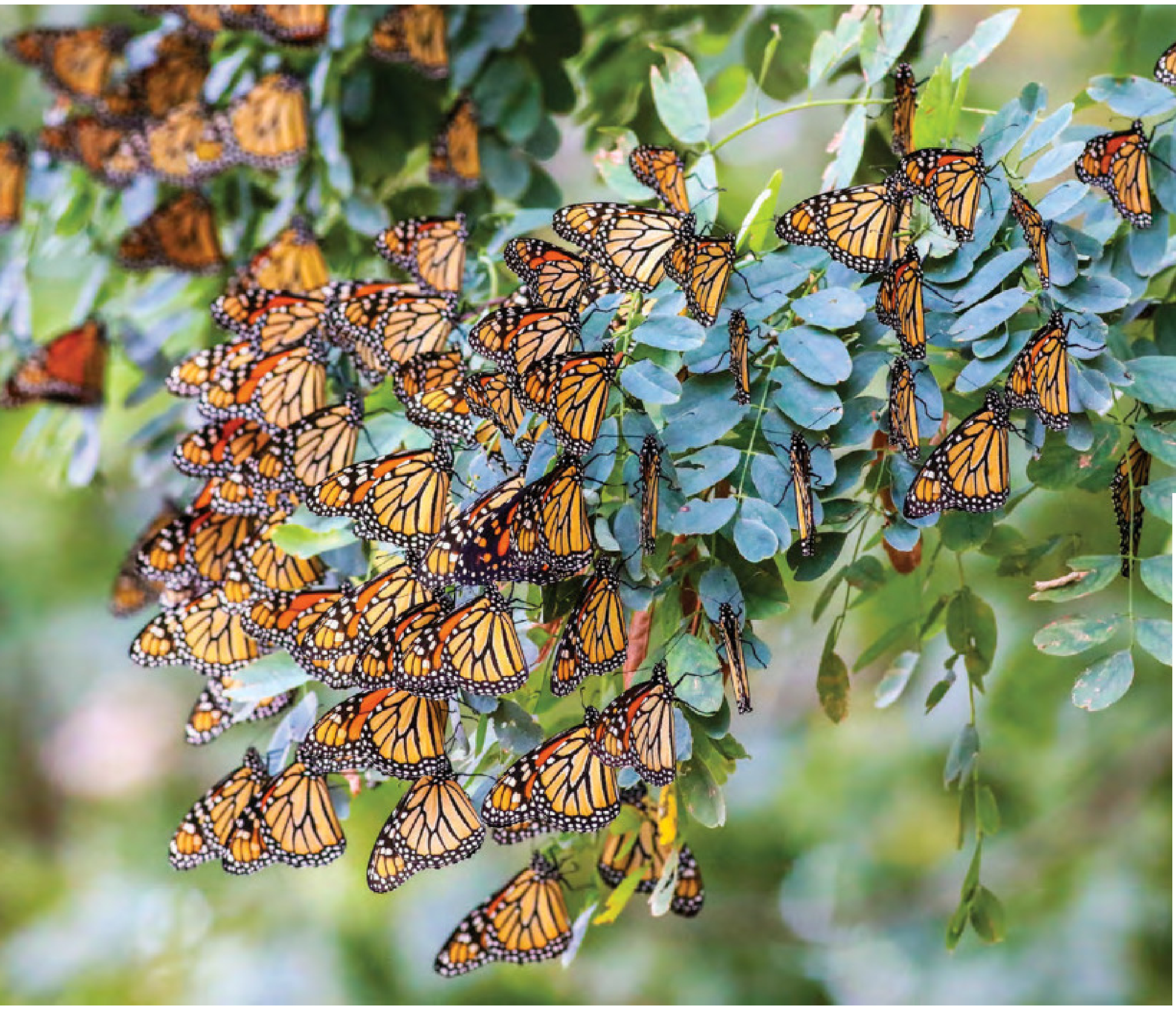
David Heilman EGG HARBOR, WI



A GRASS SKIPPER
enjoys a snack from a sunflower on my back porch on a hot summer day.
Victoria Halydier SUWANEE, GA

SEMIFINALIST

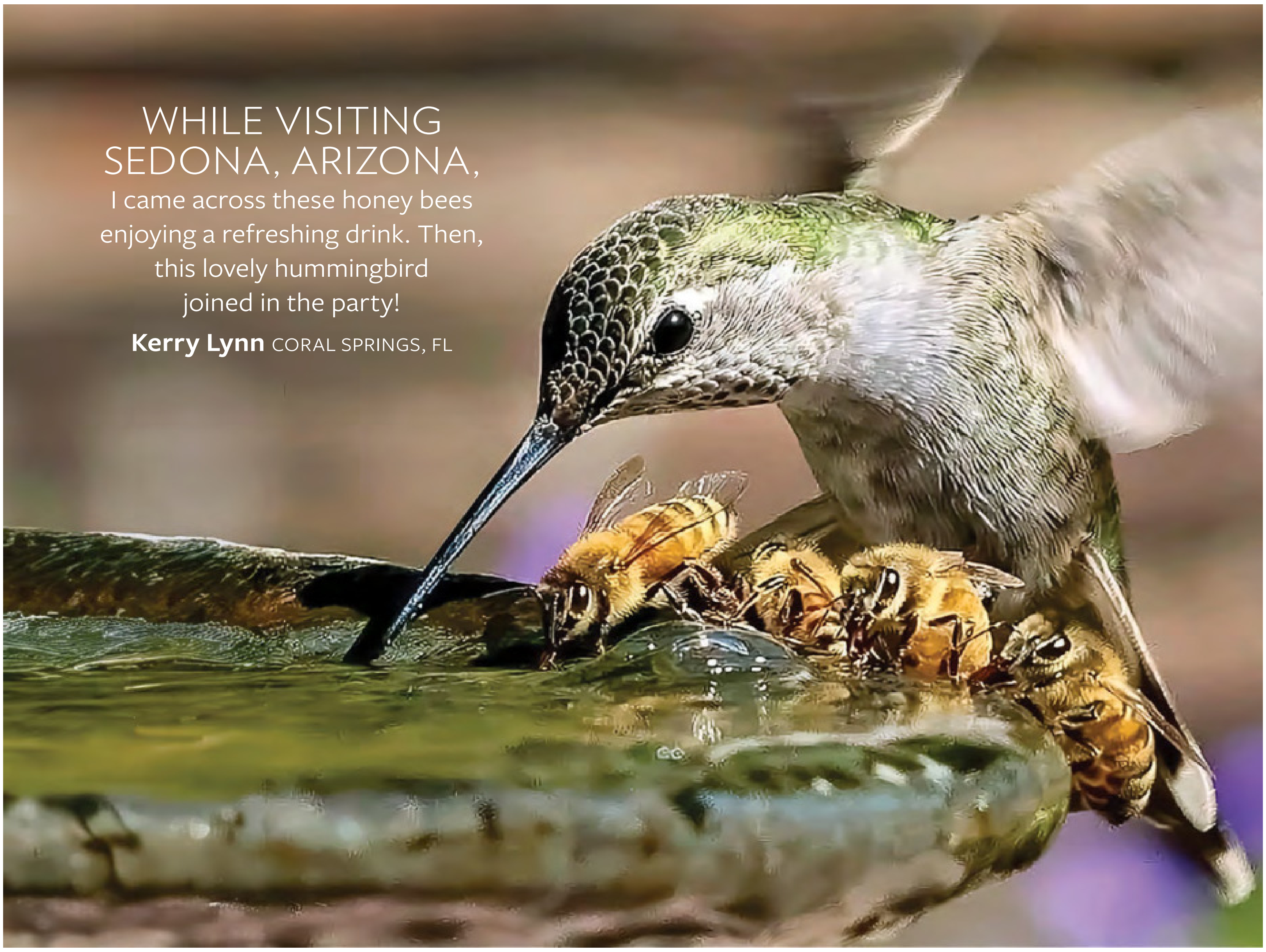
2023 PHOTO CONTEST



A SPECTACULAR EVENT HAPPENS

in Cleveland, Ohio, during the monarch migration. These butterflies stop by a specific park for a few days to rest during their journey south to Mexico, where they spend the winter months. It is such a special sight to witness.

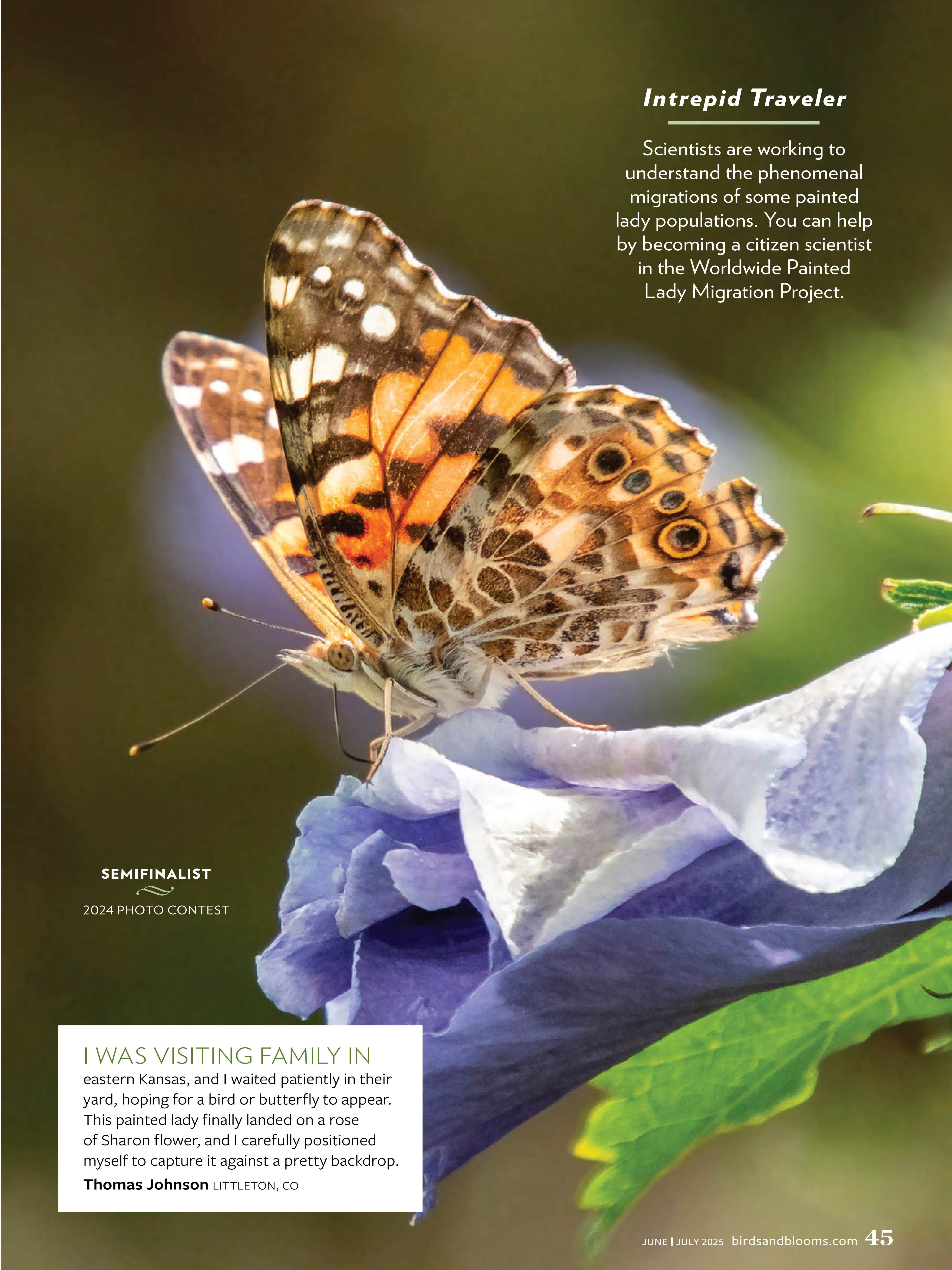
Debbie Parker MEDINA, OH



WHILE VISITING SEDONA, ARIZONA,

I came across these honey bees enjoying a refreshing drink. Then, this lovely hummingbird joined in the party!

Kerry Lynn CORAL SPRINGS, FL



Intrepid Traveler

Scientists are working to understand the phenomenal migrations of some painted lady populations. You can help by becoming a citizen scientist in the Worldwide Painted Lady Migration Project.

SEMIFINALIST

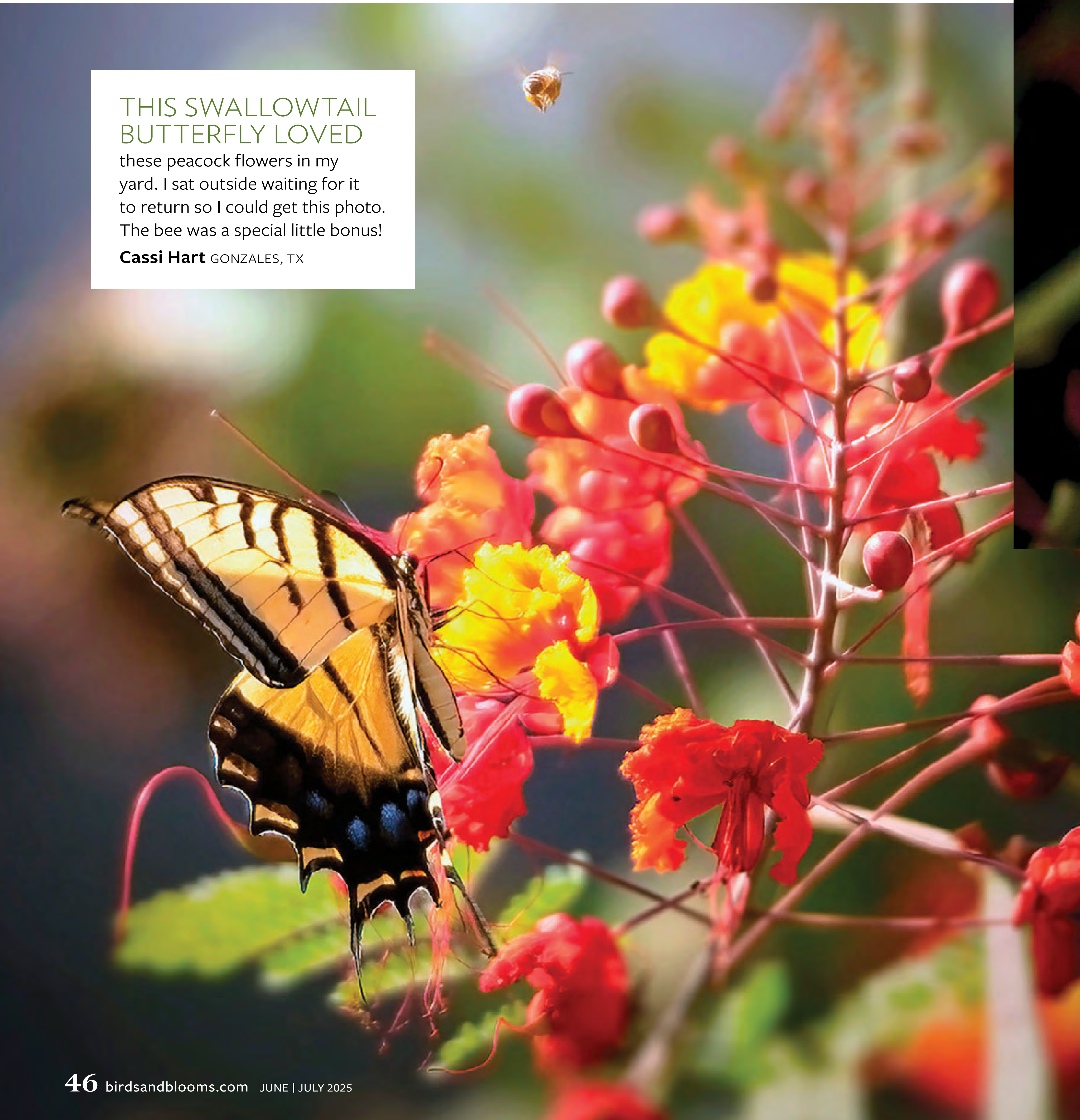
2024 PHOTO CONTEST

I WAS VISITING FAMILY IN eastern Kansas, and I waited patiently in their yard, hoping for a bird or butterfly to appear. This painted lady finally landed on a rose of Sharon flower, and I carefully positioned myself to capture it against a pretty backdrop.

Thomas Johnson LITTLETON, CO

THE WHITE-LINED SPHINX MOTH IS A TYPE

of hummingbird moth, and it nectars on flowers similar to the way hummingbirds do. They fly flower to flower, hovering in the air while using their long proboscis to extract the nectar. They are often mistaken for hummingbirds! This little beauty came to my garden after dark, and I took this picture using a flash with my Olympus E-M1 Mark II camera. **Barbara Houlihan** MADISON, WI



THIS SWALLOWTAIL BUTTERFLY LOVED

these peacock flowers in my yard. I sat outside waiting for it to return so I could get this photo. The bee was a special little bonus!

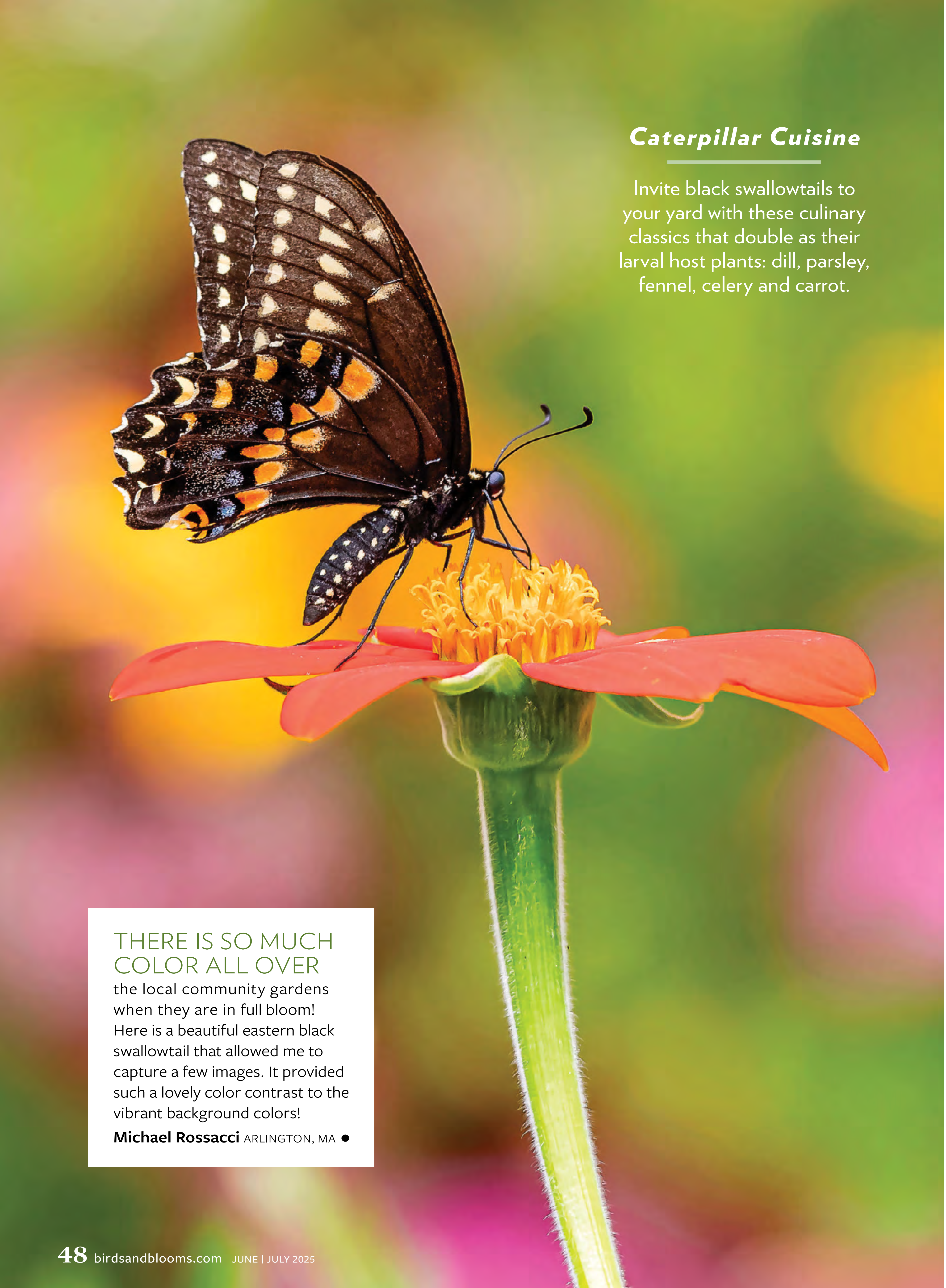
Cassi Hart GONZALES, TX

Beauty in Darkness

Attract nocturnal pollinators such as moths, fireflies and bats with a moon garden of fragrant, white and night-blooming flowers.

WHILE TAKING PHOTOS OF A red poppy, a western honey bee landed in the middle of the flower and was soon dusted and sparkling with pollen. The simplicity of the red poppy contrasted against a background of a dark tree trunk and the sparkling pollinator make this one of my favorite captures of all time. I took this with a Canon EOS Rebel SL1.

Stacy Gessler MOSCOW, ID



Caterpillar Cuisine

Invite black swallowtails to your yard with these culinary classics that double as their larval host plants: dill, parsley, fennel, celery and carrot.

THERE IS SO MUCH COLOR ALL OVER the local community gardens when they are in full bloom! Here is a beautiful eastern black swallowtail that allowed me to capture a few images. It provided such a lovely color contrast to the vibrant background colors!

Michael Rossacci ARLINGTON, MA ●

2024 GRAND PRIZE WINNER
TIGER SWALLOWTAIL BY
Linda McCann
REDLANDS, CA

Birds & Blooms

NEW THIS YEAR!
We've added a hummingbird category, so there are more chances to win. You can now enter up to four photos!

ANNUAL PHOTO CONTEST

Calling All Photographers!

SHARE YOUR BEST SHOTS! The annual *Birds & Blooms* Photo Contest is here! Send us your favorite photo in one (or more) of our four categories—birds, butterflies, hummingbirds and blooms—for your chance to win the $1,000 grand prize. **Enter by July 31!**.

WIN $1,000! ENTER NOW

It's easier than ever to submit your photos! Go to *birdsandblooms .com/contests* for the official rules and entry details or hover your phone's camera here.

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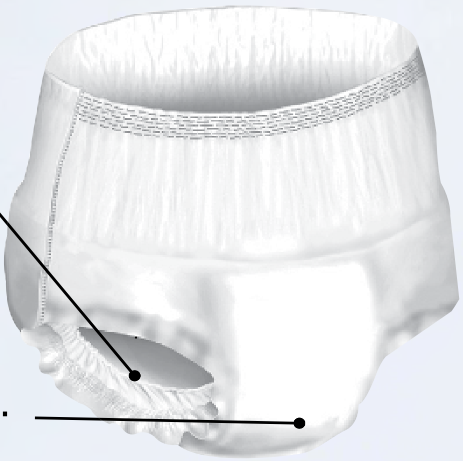

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☐ X-Large (42-65”)	12 / bag	ROUXT
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Reassure® Pads		
☐ Extra Coverage Overnight	30 / bag	REDPEXT
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Ask the Experts

The pros share their knowledge and answer reader questions

Female ruby-throated hummingbird

MICHAEL O'KANE

Q Shortly after the hummingbirds show up in April, they disappear for a week or two and then return. I thought they were building nests, but why would males also stop visiting feeders if they don't help build nests?

Donna Gendusa MILLVILLE, NJ

Kenn and Kimberly: Even early in the breeding season, when male ruby-throated hummingbirds are actively courting and females are building nests, they should continue to visit local feeders and other food sources regularly. We suspect what's happening in your area is that migrants are passing through in mid-April, pausing for a few days and visiting your feeders while they are there. After these migrants continue north, there may be a lull in activity before the arrival of the hummingbirds that will stay to nest in your neighborhood.

Male
Baltimore oriole

Q Should birds be fed during the summer?

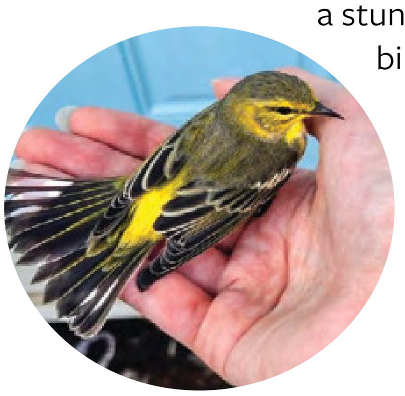
Joe Reed TERRE HAUTE, IN

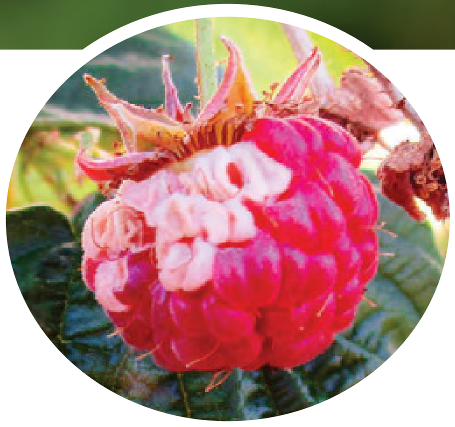
Kenn and Kimberly: The main reason to feed birds is to bring them up close where we can watch them. They don't really need our handouts, except very rarely during extreme weather, but there's no reason to stop feeding them in summer. For summertime feeding, we recommend using smaller amounts of high-quality food, such as black oil sunflower and Nyjer seeds, and varying the offerings with things such as orange halves, apple slices, peanuts or small amounts of grape jelly.

Q I found this bird on my doorstep. Can you help identify what kind of bird this is?

Melanie Troutner MYERSVILLE, MD

Kenn and Kimberly: The bird is a Cape May warbler, with lemon rump, narrow wing bars and gray cap, and it probably hit a window and was stunned. Window strikes are tragically common, killing many birds every year. Here's a summary of advice from wildlife care professionals: If you find a stunned bird, put it in a small box. Prop the bird up in a normal position with soft cloth. Don't try to give it food or water. These birds often have hidden injuries, so take it to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator if possible. If that isn't feasible and the bird seems alert and unhurt after resting a while, let it go in a safe place outdoors.





Q My raspberries have large white blotches on the berries. About half of the berries have this, and it is random on individual canes. What is this, and are the berries safe to eat?

Stanley Hayes MONTROSE, CO

Melinda: Sunscald and white drupelet due to direct sun exposure and high temperatures cause portions of the fruit to turn white. These are not diseases but the plant's response to the environment. It's safe to eat the berries but, as you probably noticed, the white portions lack flavor. We can't change the weather, but proper watering during hot, dry weather may help reduce the amount of fruit affected.

BALTIMORE ORIOLE: JAY STOUT

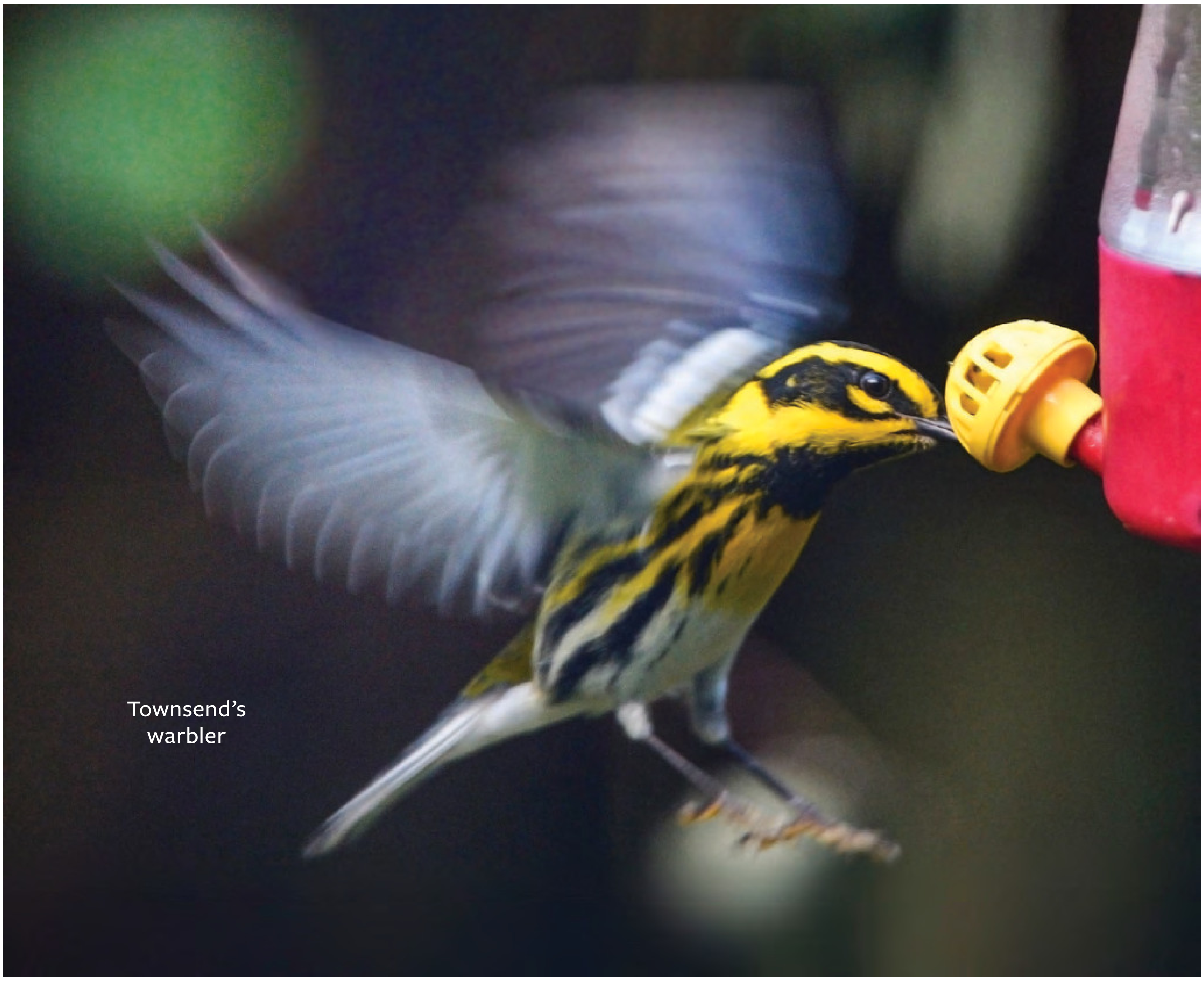
Female black-chinned hummingbird at clematis

DEE ELLIOTT

Q I have a clematis on a trellis on the northwest side of my house. It blooms but never grows enough to fill the trellis. It gets a couple hours of direct sunlight in the early morning and evening. Is there a flowering vine that could do better in these conditions?

Diane Kaplan OWATONNA, MN

Melinda: The fact your sun-loving clematis is flowering means you receive a fair amount of sunlight. Consider our native coral honeysuckle vine, which is hardy in Zones 4 to 8. The trumpet-shaped flowers appear throughout the growing season and attract hummingbirds and butterflies. The Major Wheeler cultivar has brilliant red flowers all season long, is less susceptible to powdery mildew, and is heat and drought-tolerant once established. Dutchman's pipe is another native to North America, hardy in Zones 4 to 8 and grows well in part shade and moist soil. Its large, heart-shaped leaves provide excellent screening but somewhat mask the unique pipe-shaped flowers that appear early in the season.

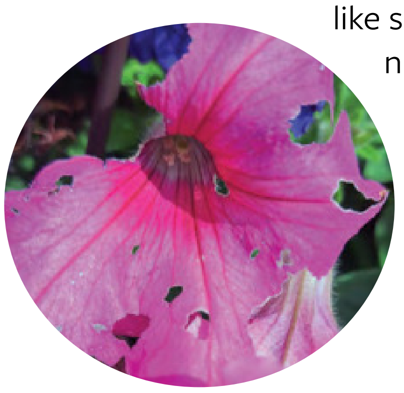


Townsend's warbler

Q Earwigs are destroying the petunias in my hanging baskets and planters. Is there a way to eliminate earwigs without harming pollinators that visit the flowers?

Karen Sexton FISH HAVEN, ID

Melinda: Many gardeners in a variety of locations experienced a recent explosion of earwigs. These insects are predators of aphids and stink bugs but do like to feed on the leaves and flowers of many plants. Earwigs prefer cool, dark conditions and tend to feed at night like slugs. Trap them by placing rolled up newspaper or cardboard or hollow pieces of bamboo throughout your gardens. In the morning knock the earwigs out of these traps and into a can of soapy water. Replace the traps and repeat throughout the season as needed.



Q This Townsend's warbler likes to sip from my hummingbird feeder! Is that common behavior for a warbler?

Leslie Scopes Anderson ARCATA, CA

Kenn and Kimberly: Several kinds of warblers have an apparent taste for sweetness and might be seen visiting flowers to feed on nectar. Sometimes, one of these birds will discover sugar-water in a feeder—probably from watching other birds—and will start coming to the feeder regularly. This happens more often with Cape May warbler, orange-crowned warbler and yellow-rumped warbler, but various other species, such as the Townsend's warbler, sometimes pick up the habit as well.

Q As a boy, my grandma taught me to water at the base of the plants in her garden, and always in the evening so the water could soak in overnight without evaporating in the sun. Recently, I read to water in the morning. When is the best time to water?

William Toth MECHANICSBURG, PA

Melinda: Your grandma provided sound advice. She knew to keep the foliage dry when watering at night. Early morning is the best time to water when using a sprinkler or other tool that wets the foliage. The leaves have time to dry before dark, reducing the risk of disease, and the water can soak into the soil, limiting the amount lost to evaporation as the temperatures rise.

Q My Autumn Purple white ash tree lost bark on its south facing side. Should I do anything to help protect the tree?

Markus Tyboroski COLORADO SPRINGS, CO

Melinda: Your tree experienced sunscald that led to frost crack damage on the trunk. This problem is most common on young and thin barked trees. It occurs when the winter sun warms the tree sap that expands as it freezes at night, resulting in a crack. Frost cracks usually occur on the south or west side of the tree. It's best to do nothing to the damaged area, and allow the tree to continue callousing over the wound which helps keep out insects and disease. When we start cutting into the trunk or sealing it off with paint or other sealants, we cause more problems. Do make sure your tree is properly watered throughout the growing season and into fall. Avoid late season high nitrogen fertilizers that can contribute to this problem. And regularly monitor for signs of the invasive and destructive emerald ash borer.

American kestrel

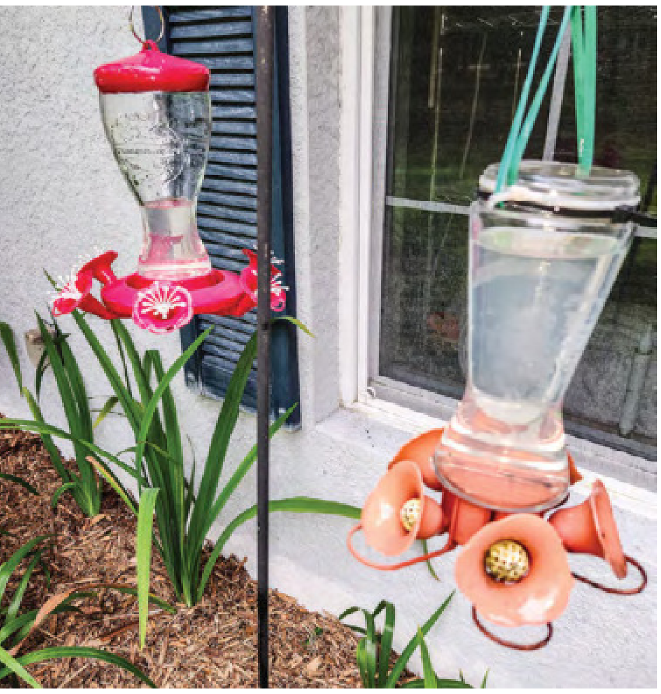
Q On an episode of *All Creatures Great and Small* on PBS, veterinarian James Herriot repaired a kestrel's damaged wing by pulling out a broken feather, inserting a toothpick in the end to serve as a splint, and then inserting the toothpick end of the feather into the bird's wing. Was this a real technique that a vet would have used in the past, and would it work?

fe **Judy Roberts** GRAYTOWN, OH

Kenn and Kimberly: We haven't seen that particular episode, but a method of feather repair called imping has been used by falconers and others for centuries. In this method, the broken feather isn't pulled out—it's left firmly embedded in the wing, and a fresh partial feather is attached to it to replace the broken-off part. A splint, made of a toothpick or something similar (depending on the size of the bird), connects the new piece to the existing feather base. Within a year, when the bird goes through its normal molt, the repaired feather will fall out, and a fresh complete one will grow in its place.

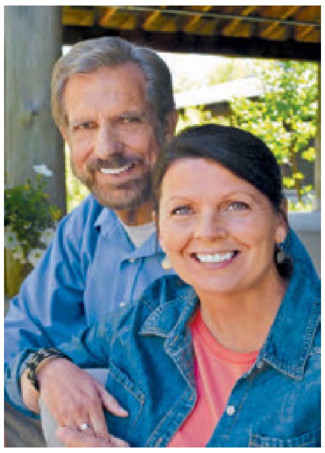
WATERING CAN: BRIAN MARSHALL/GETTY IMAGES; KESTREL: GILBERTO SANCHEZ

Q I have a new hummingbird feeder that hummingbirds will not touch, but they love to drink from the old, faded one right next to it. Would it be safe to dye the white flowers on the new feeder red? **Sharon Echols** MOORE HAVEN, FL



Kenn and Kimberly: Sometimes it's hard to tell why birds favor a specific feeder over others. But the white plastic sprays on your new feeder seem to be there just for decoration and are not serving any useful purpose. Rather than trying to dye them a different color, we'd suggest seeing if you can cut them off at the base or remove them entirely and still have a functioning feeder. If not, your older, faded feeder still seems to work.

MEET THE EXPERTS



Kimberly and Kenn Kaufman are the duo behind the Kaufman Field Guide *series. They speak and lead bird trips all over the world.*

Melinda Myers is a nationally known, award-winning garden expert, TV and radio host, and author of more than 20 books.

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Annuals or perennials?

Readers share whether they prefer plants that keep coming back or start fresh every spring

Even though I love the predictability of perennials, **annuals give me a chance to change things up** each year. I love the variety and experimentation annuals allow.
Monica Partington RALEIGH, NC

Prairie iris

Perennials are easy to care for, and it's so fun to watch wildlife enjoy the native ones! fe **Megan Long** ZUMBROTA, MN

Having multiple sclerosis, I prefer low-maintenance *perennials that I can plant once* and enjoy for years to come. **Tracy McCullum** JOLIET, IL

Tuberous begonia

Many **annuals, such as impatiens, begonias and coleus,** thrive in my shady yard. I can vary the colors and make different mixed pots year to year. I enjoy buying flowers every spring, and I don't have to overwinter them!
Nancy Hamlin PHOENIX, NY

Alabama Jubilee daylily

Perennials! I love anticipating their return, like old friends who winter in Florida and come back north for spring and summer. And many remind me of the friends who gave them to me.

fe **Judy Roberts**
GRAYTOWN, OH

I like **perennials native to Kansas soil**, and every year, I love dividing the growth to share the plants and seeds with my local gardening friends.

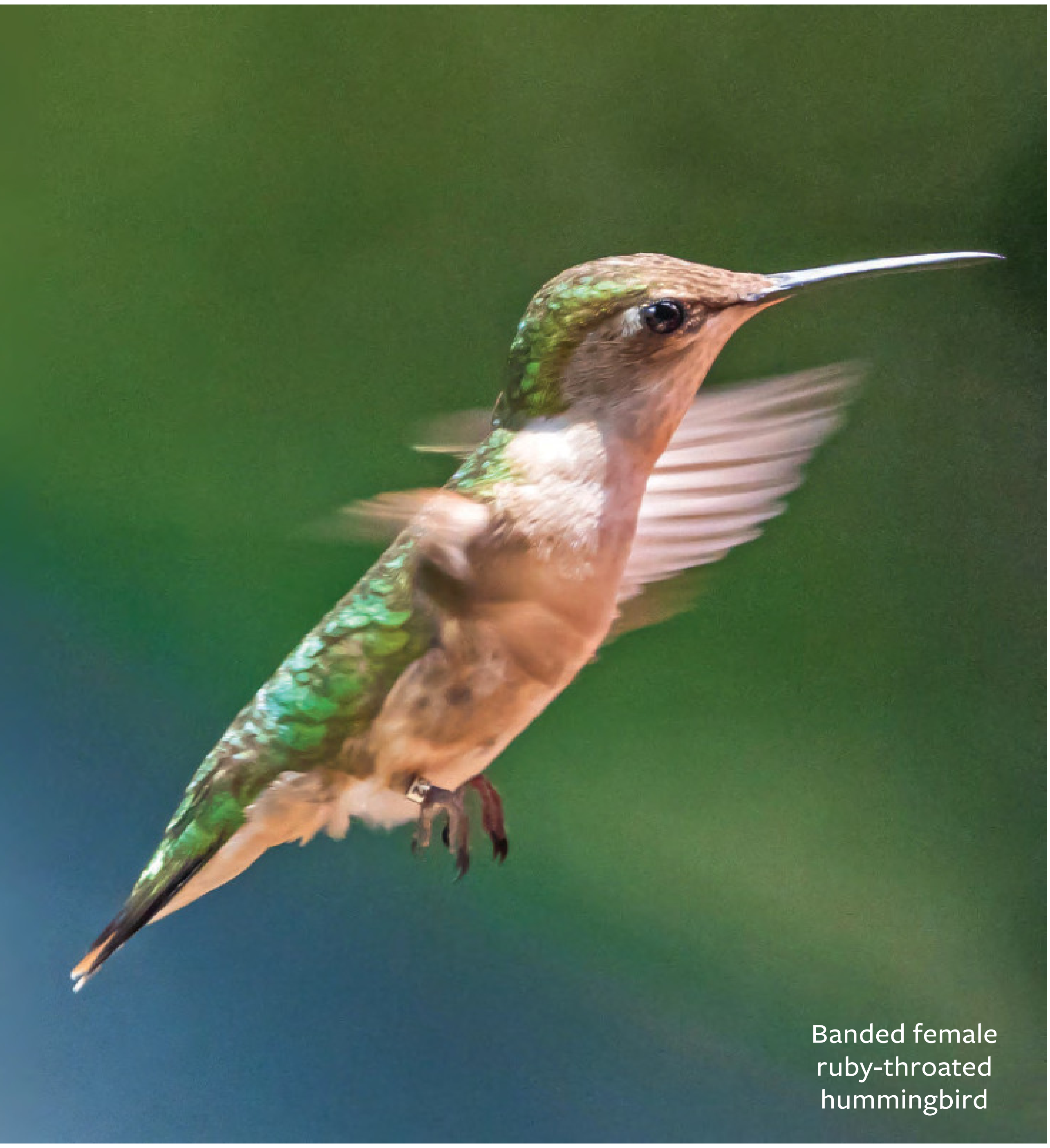
fe **Jennifer Broadstreet Hess**
MARION, KS

YOUR TURN!

Q: What birding or gardening gear is on your wishlist?

Share your answer with us at *birdsandblooms.com/submit*.

FROM TOP: JEAN STOKES; GILBERTO SANCHEZ-PEREZ; ELIZABETH NORMAN



Banded female ruby-throated hummingbird

Tracking Tiny Travelers

Small, numbered rings reveal the secrets of hummingbird migration

BY KENN AND KIMBERLY KAUFMAN

One of the best tools for tracking where migrating birds go is through banding, which involves placing a numbered metal ring on a bird's leg and then releasing it. When that individual is captured or found again, the unique number on the band identifies it.

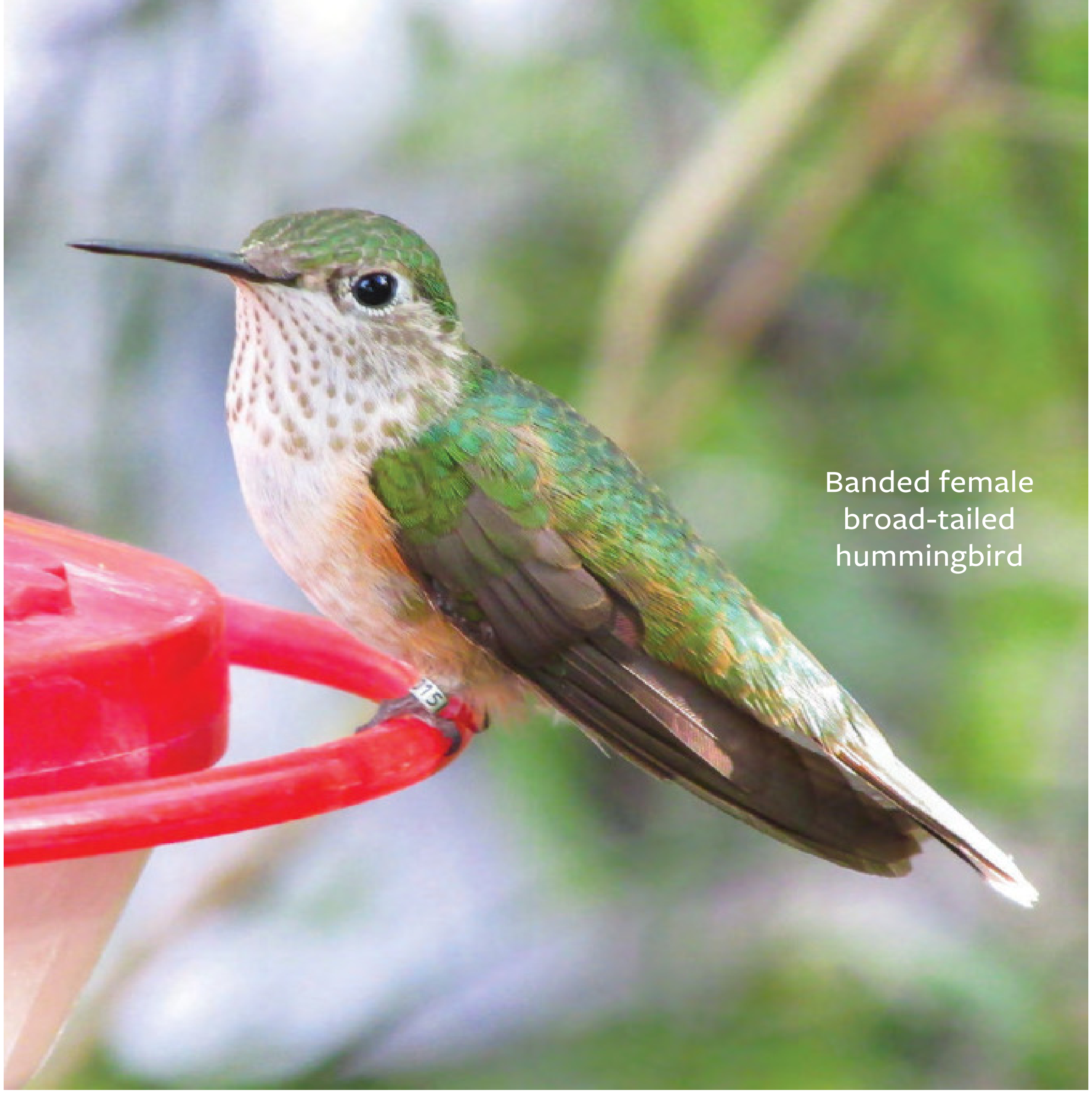
A Specialized Process

All such research in the U.S. requires special permits from the federal Bird Banding Lab, but anyone who handles hummingbirds must go through extra steps. According to Ryan Jacob, banding projects director for the Black Swamp Bird Observatory, "Special training is required in the methods of hummingbird handling, banding and band making."

Band making? That's right: While the bands for other birds arrive already formed and ready to use, Ryan says, "hummingbird banders receive a thin metal sheet of 100 bands that must be cut into strips, with each individual band then cut from that strip to a specific length. The edges of the band must be sanded smooth and then each band is formed into a perfect circle. Hummingbird banding is equal parts band preparation and actual banding!"

To catch these tiny gems, some banders use lightweight mist nets that stop the birds and hold them in a gentle web. Others set up a wire cage around hummingbird feeders, with a door that can be closed when a bird visits. As soon as a bird is captured, it is removed and processed quickly. "Data collected includes age and sex; wing, tail and

SHERRY ROSEN



Banded female broad-tailed hummingbird

bill length; weight; and the amount of gorget feathers," Ryan says. Then the bird is fitted with a precisely sized, minuscule band, and it buzzes away.

A Treasure Trove of Discoveries

Hummingbird banding has given us unique insights into the lives of these feathered jewels. For example, we now know that although their average lifespan is short, some individuals live seven years or more. One female broad-tailed hummingbird was more than 12 years old when recaptured.

Banding has also revealed amazing things about the journeys of these birds. For example, migrating ruby-throated hummingbirds usually remain in stopover sites for less than a day, but sometimes stay for up to two weeks, especially along the Gulf Coast. In Louisiana, where many typically western species spend the winter, a banded rufous hummingbird returned to the same yard for eight winters in a row. A black-chinned hummingbird banded in Louisiana one winter was captured in Idaho the following summer. Another black-chinned, banded in Louisiana, was recaptured later in Arizona, then found again the next winter in Louisiana. Clearly these birds may survive for a long time when they stray outside their normal ranges, but without banding, we would never know that.

While the actual banding of these small creatures occurs at only a few places, the banded birds may show up anywhere. Ryan encourages backyard birders to pay attention. "Look closely at the legs of hummingbirds visiting your feeder," he says. "You may just find a little silver band teeming with information!"

Kenn and Kimberly Kaufman encourage you to learn more about bird banding, and to consider volunteering for programs in your area.

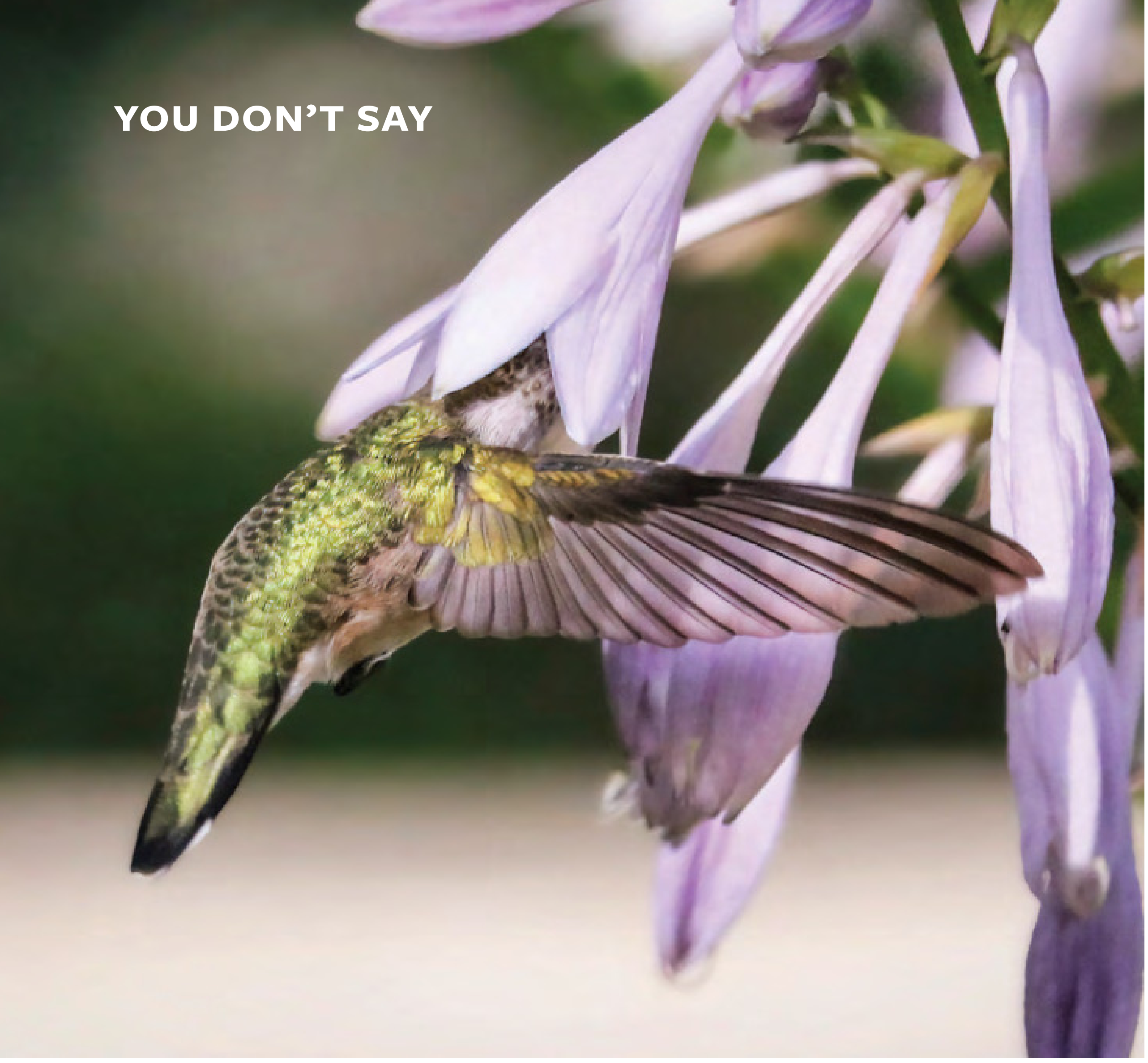
CLAIRE PEDUTO

ID OF A MYSTERY PAIR

Rufous and Allen's are two western hummingbirds that often wander east. But females and the young of these two species are almost impossible to separate—unless you can examine them in the hand and measure certain tail feathers. When a bird of this pair shows up at an eastern feeder, banders are often called in to resolve which species is present.

This happened in Amanda Jackson's Columbia, Missouri backyard. When a rufous showed up at her feeder in October 2022, she called her local Audubon chapter. "Before I knew it, I had birders from all over the state coming to see their 'lifer,'" she says. "Two banders came and successfully banded my rufous." The bird became part of their family, Amanda says. "I frantically changed the feeders multiple times a day because it started to freeze," she says. The bird eventually moved on in late November.

The rufous hummingbird from Amanda's backyard



Caption This!

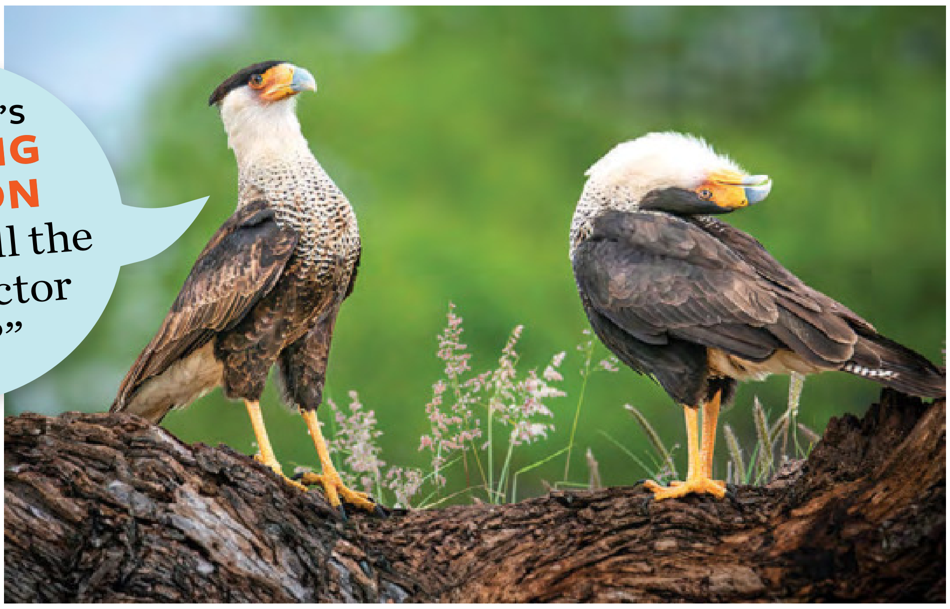
A hungry, hungry hummingbird fills up

Kathy Landsinger of Holmen, Wisconsin, captured a photo of this hungry ruby-throat with its whole head in a hosta bloom! "They are amazing birds," she says.

SHARE YOUR CAPTION

Your funny caption for this bird scene could appear in the next issue. Share your clever idea at *birdsandblooms.com/caption*.

LAST ISSUE'S
WINNING CAPTION
"Shall I call the chiropractor again?"



Caption submitted by Linda Grimm of Washington, Pennsylvania.

CRESTED CARACARAS: LINDA SCHER

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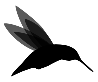

Find the Hummingbird

In each issue, we hide a hummingbird like the one above left. Enter to win at *birdsandblooms.com/contests* if you find it. Winners get a one-year subscription to *Birds & Blooms*. In the April/May issue, we hid it on page 25.

HIDDEN OBJECT GUIDELINES
No purchase necessary to enter to win. Purchase will not improve your chances of winning. Sweepstakes is open to legal residents age 18 years or older of the U.S., its territories and possessions, or of Canada (excluding the Province of Quebec). Sweepstakes begins on May 21, 2025, and ends on Sept. 23, 2025. Visit *birdsandblooms.com/contests* for official rules. VOID WHERE PROHIBITED. Sweepstakes sponsored by RDA Enthusiast Brands, LLC.

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We love hearing from you—in fact, we couldn't publish this magazine without you!

To share stories, photos, backyard tips, questions for our experts or other content, use the form at *birdsandblooms.com/submit* and follow the online instructions.

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Field Editors

Find content from these field editors in this issue:

fe **Jennifer Broadstreet Hess, Judy Roberts, Megan Long**

Volunteer nature lovers from across the U.S. and Canada belong to our *Birds & Blooms* Field Editor family. They share tips, stories, photos and happenings from their very own backyards, neighborhoods and regions.

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DID YOU KNOW?

Nutrient Knowledge

Get the scoop on how fertilizers boost your soil **BY RACHAEL LISKA**

6 Always check the label, but, generally, incorporate organic slow-release fertilizer 4 to 6 inches deep before planting. Apply quick-release fertilizers around the plant's drip line for more immediate results during the growing season.

1 The first number in the sequence of three numbers found on a fertilizer label is the percentage of nitrogen present in it.

6.5 A soil pH test measures the acidity or alkalinity that influences nutrient availability to plants. The ideal pH level varies for different plants, but 6.5 is optimal for a vegetable garden.

3 There are three primary macronutrients found in fertilizers—nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K).

17 Plants require 17 nutrients for growth. Three come from air and water; the remaining 14 come from the soil (and fertilizers).

50 The release of nutrients from organic fertilizers relies on the activity of microorganisms, which happens in adequately moist soil with a temperature higher than 50 degrees.

FROM TOP: VALERIY_G, IVELIN DENEV/GETTY IMAGES (2)

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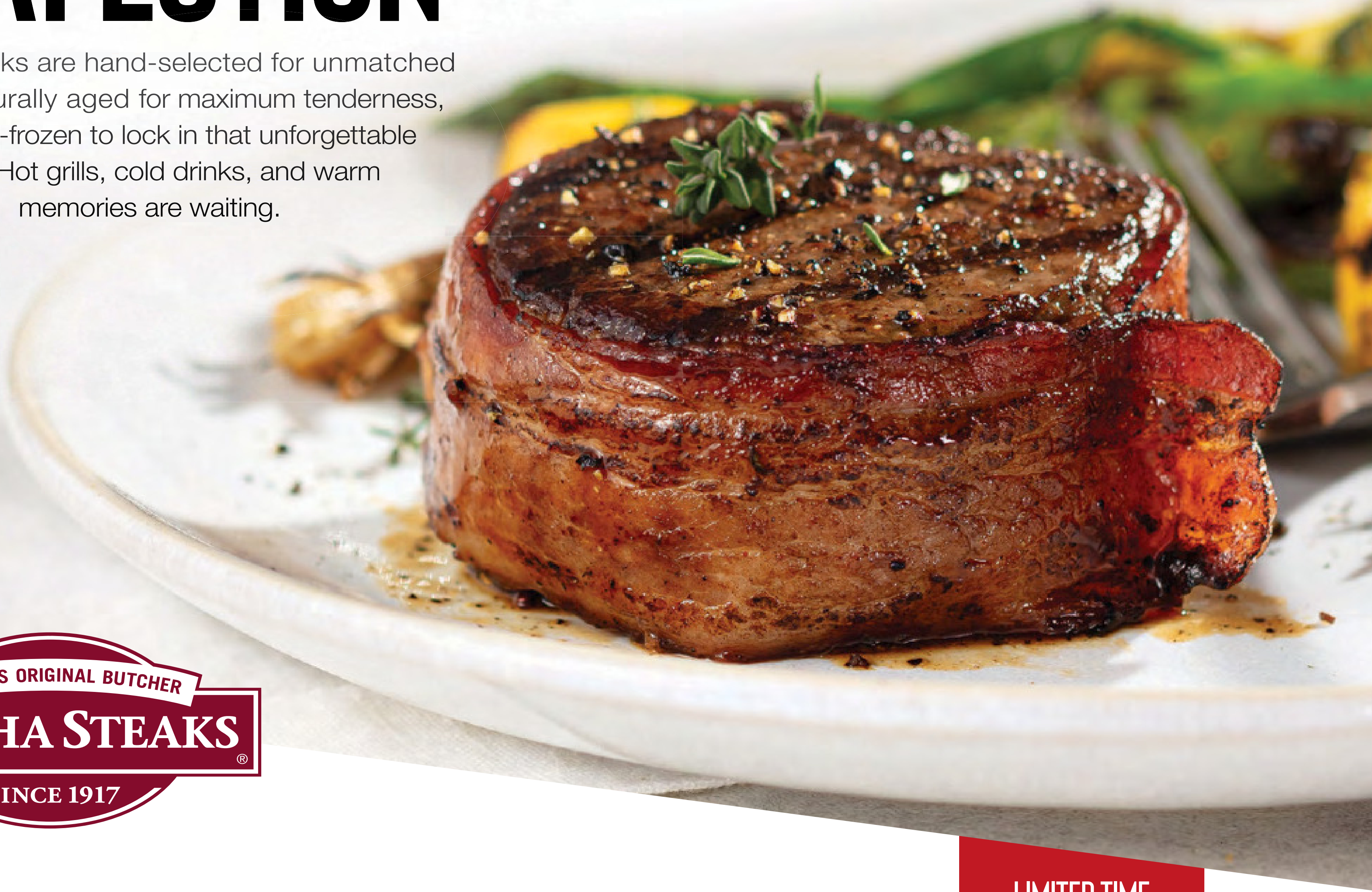

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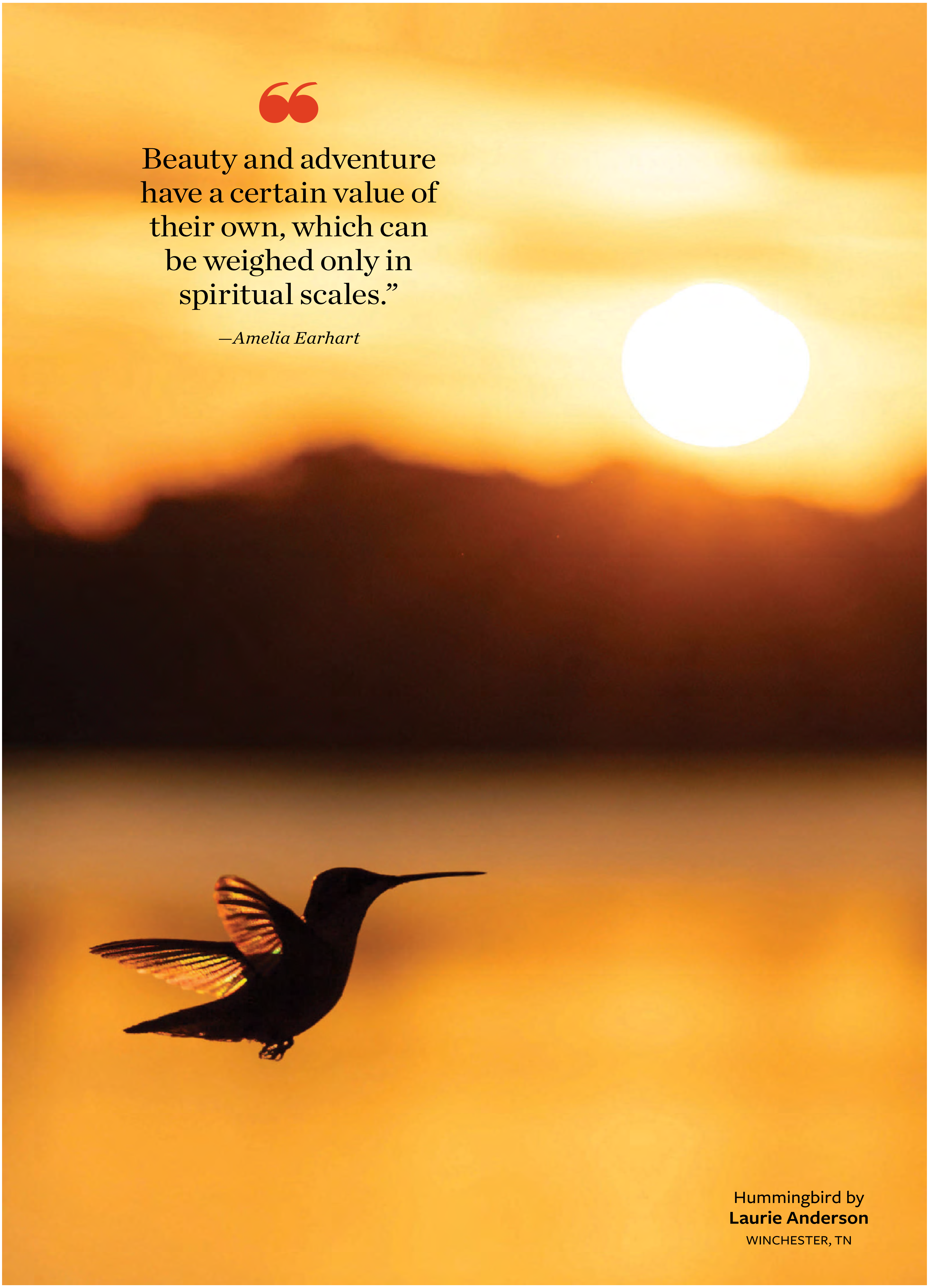

> “Beauty and adventure have a certain value of their own, which can be weighed only in spiritual scales.”
>
> *—Amelia Earhart*

Hummingbird by
Laurie Anderson
WINCHESTER, TN